Laminitis – prevention is better than cure

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It's a well-known saying among horse owners: "A horse is as good as its worst hoof." No other part of the body is exposed to so much stress. Hoof diseases can arise due to various causes, for example infections, inadequate hoof care or incorrect shoeing, incorrect and excessive strain, or inappropriate husbandry and feeding conditions. Laminitis is probably one of the most painful diseases.

What is laminitis?

Laminitis is an inflammation of the hoof corium. The hoof corium is the connection between the hoof horn and the coffin bone and forms the centre of the hoof. If the acute inflammation persists for a long time, the hoof corium between the hoof horn and the coffin bone becomes detached. Despite treatment, the affected horses are often severely restricted in their performance after a laminitis episode. The rule is: "After a laminitis episode is before a laminitis episode" – because horses with laminitis are considered to be at high risk for the rest of their lives and must be kept and fed accordingly.

How do you recognize a laminitis?

The most obvious symptom is the "dog-like" position that horses adopt during a laminitis episode. Horses try to escape the acute pain in their hooves in this way. More important for horse owners, however, is the observation of initial symptoms such as: a stiff gait, slightly warmed and swollen coronet band, and pressure sensitivity.

What can trigger laminitis?

Laminitis can have various causes, for example mechanical triggers such as incorrect loading or hoof trimming. Poisoning, including too much undigested starch and fructan in the grass, can also be the cause of laminitis. Metabolic diseases such as equine cushing syndrome (ECS) or equine metabolic syndrome are increasingly at the centre of laminitis therapy. Horse owners can minimize or even eliminate risk factors such as mechanical triggers by reducing the amount of training or correcting the shoeing. The risk factors "poisoning" and "metabolic disorders", on the other hand, require long-term changes in feeding.

Overacidification of the intestine

In the past, laminitis was often associated with an excess of protein. Today we know that other factors, such as a disturbance of the acid-base balance (acidosis) in the large intestine, have a greater influence. An excess of undigested starch or too much fructan in the large intestine leads to a negative change in the intestinal flora. The pH value in the intestine drops, leading to hyperacidity and bacterial death. Released toxins enter the bloodstream and ultimately manifest themselves in the hoof as laminitis. Horse owners can recognize an overacidification of the intestine at an early stage by the sour, foul odour and the unshapely consistency of the horse's faeces.

Equine cushing syndrome (ECS)

A horse that repeatedly suffers from laminitis should be examined by a vet for metabolic diseases such as EMS (PSSM1 or PSSM2) or ECS. ECS is often associated with gradual, recurring bouts of laminitis. This is triggered by an adenoma on the pituitary gland, which leads to an overproduction of cortisol in the adrenal cortex. Horses with ECS can often be recognized by a slower shedding, formation of curls in the coat, emaciation, loss of muscle, and a simultaneous fat pad on the comb.

Cushing's syndrome is often observed in old horses (> 20 years), which is why it is also referred to as acquired adult-onset diabetes due to insulin resistance. Horses with equine cushing's syndrome can be stabilized by the long-term administration of special medication and a corresponding switch to low-carbohydrate, low-sugar and high-fibre feed can be very well. A cure is not possible, but horses that are fed in support of therapy can still lead an almost symptom-free life.

Equine metabolic syndrome (EMS / PSSM1 / PSSM2)

Another metabolic disease is the equine metabolic syndrome. EMS is a hormonal disorder that is partly genetic (PSSM1). EMS is exacerbated by permanent overfeeding combined with physical inactivity, resulting in horses becoming very fat. A so-called reduction diet is also recommended for EMS, with the main focus on a diet low in starch and sugar, but at the same time rich in crude fibre and more exercise.

Brewers' yeast: absorbs harmful substances, stabilizes the intestine and "nourishes" the hoof

Brewers' yeast promotes the development of the positive intestinal flora and can therefore help to stabilize the microflora. The hop substances contained in brewers' yeast have a calming, antibacterial and antioxidant effect. The brewers' yeast cell wall components (MOS – mannanoligosaccharides) help to displace pathogenic germs and bind mycotoxins in the intestine. They have a proven prebiotic effect on the large intestine and a positive effect on inflammatory processes.
In addition, the nutrients and active ingredients in brewers' yeast have a decisive influence on the hoof horn. The high content of amino acids and water-soluble B vitamins (e.g. biotin) helps to improve the hoof quality in the long term, especially after an episode of laminitis when hoof substance needs to be rebuilt.
Brewers' yeast can also have a supportive effect on metabolic diseases. It is particularly important to use feed that has a fermentative effect on the microflora when feeding a reduction diet. If the microflora can work optimally, it utilizes the nutrients supplied much better and concentrates can be reduced. Brewers' yeast also contains valuable amino acids, especially essential ones. These serve as building blocks for the muscle development. Horses with metabolic disorders often suffer from loss of their muscle mass.

Brewers' yeast products offer many benefits to strengthen the hooves and improve hoof quality in the long term.

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