



140 Swanport Road
Po Box 5181
Murray Bridge SA 5253
Ph 08 8531 4000
Fax 08 8531 4099
Email mbvet@lm.net.au
www.murraybridgevet.com.au
ABN 44 114 962 453



EQUINE CHOKE

What is it?

Choke is the term used for an obstruction of the oesophagus. The oesophagus is the connection between the mouth and the stomach. It is of narrow diameter and can become blocked with food, particularly hay or apples/potatoes.

What are the symptoms?

- Distress
- Head and neck extended
- Salivation
- Food coming out of the nostrils
- Depression if longstanding

Food coming out of the nostrils in a horse with choke.



How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on clinical signs and confirmed by failure to pass a stomach tube all the way. Endoscopy (passing a camera into the oesophagus) can also be used. Sometimes the obstruction can also be felt along the horses' neck.

How is it treated?

The horse is sedated so that the head hangs low, and given medication to relax the oesophagus. The obstruction is then gently flushed with water via a stomach tube. If this is unsuccessful the procedure can be repeated in 24 hours. Surgery is a last resort for obstructions that cannot be cleared.

How can I prevent choke?

Choke often occurs when hungry, dehydrated horses are fed hay and eat it too quickly. This can be prevented by not feeding the horse directly after hard exercise, and ensuring it always has access to water.

In addition, horses with dental disease or with sharp teeth from infrequent dental care are predisposed to choke. This is because it becomes painful for them to chew their food thoroughly, so food is swallowed with minimal chewing.

Finally, ensure to cut apples and carrots up appropriately prior to feeding.