



A GUIDE TO: **SARCOIDS**

WHAT ARE SARCOIDS?



Professional



Caring

A sarcoid is a common type of skin tumour, affecting equids only (horses and donkeys). These comprise proliferation of a normal cell type, called fibroblasts, found in the skin and connective tissues in an abnormal way. Sarcoids can take several forms and can appear to be fairly benign (do not spread or grow), whereas some are more invasive, locally spreading and growing quickly. Fibroblast cells in other body tissues are not affected. Sarcoids do not spread to the internal organs.

Sarcoids are very widespread, persistent and although have low mortality can be a very significant nuisance and affect normal activities., persistent and although have low mortality can be a very significant nuisance and affect normal activities.

WHAT DO SARCOIDS LOOK LIKE?

Sarcoids vary in appearance greatly and they can appear similar to some other equine skin conditions. They occur anywhere on the body, but are more common at sites where skin and hair is thinnest such as eyelids, inner thighs, and sheath area.



They are classified into 6 “types” based on appearance although all types are similar at a cellular level. The descriptors for these are - occult, verrucous, nodular, fibroblastic, mixed and malignant lesions but horses may have a selection of several lesions. Because they can be confused with other not so serious or other more serious conditions, it is always worthwhile getting them checked out by your vet. Commonly, sarcoids can become ulcerated and bleed if rubbed or knocked and this can cause irritation, localise infection and pain (with or without swelling) and they are also a source of fly-worry. Sarcoid transformation at a wound site can occur and is a very serious cause for a wound to heal slowly. This occurs when a horse with sarcoids sustains a wound (trauma etc.) and goes on to develop a sarcoid at the wound site. The appearance is very similar to exuberant granulation tissue (“proud flesh”). If any wound is failing to heal as expected, particularly on the limbs, sarcoid transformation should be considered your vet.



HOW DO WE TREAT SARCOIDS?

Several different types of treatment exist for sarcoids and more than one may be used at a time depending on the type and location of the lesions. The tumours are easier to remove when they are small. However, there is a high risk of recurrence and sometimes issues with healing following removal.

OPTIONS FOR TREATMENT INCLUDE:

Surgical removal: Small tumours can be removed using local anaesthetic and sedation to cut around the lump and remove it. Depending on location and number of lesions it may be safer and more effective to remove the sarcoids under a general anaesthetic. The resulting wound will either be sutured or left to heal depending on its size. Following removal alone around 50% of sarcoids will reoccur.

Ligating with rubber rings: This only works on sarcoids which stick outwards and doesn't remove the whole of the tumour. A tight band is applied around the tumour cutting off the blood supply. After a few days the part of the tumour with no blood supply will fall off.

Freezing: This causes the tissue to die away. If the sarcoid is large the bulk of it should be removed surgically first. There is less recurrence this way but scarring is likely to happen

Laser surgery: A laser is used to cut away the bulk of the sarcoid and cauterise the resulting wound at the same time.

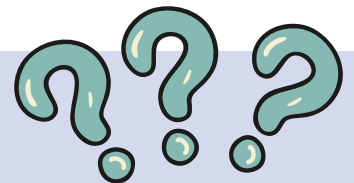
Chemotherapy: Skin killing creams can be prescribed by a vet to apply onto sarcoids. They can be very effective but care must be taken as they will also attack healthy skin and can do a lot of damage, particularly if applied over blood vessels. The creams will also damage your skin if you come into direct contact with them. Injections of skin killing chemicals can also be used alongside surgery.

Radiation therapy: Specialised equipment is used to apply a dose of radiation directly to the sarcoid. This method carries some risk to the person applying the radiation so your vet would have to have undergone extra training to use this method.

Discussing the options with your vet is very important to find the right treatment for you and your horse.

SHOULD I BUY A HORSE WITH SARCOIDS?

There are many considerations to buying a horse with sarcoids.



Many small sarcoids do not interfere with the horse's work but they all have the potential for progression. The location of the sarcoids is important as if they are in an area, which is easily abraded/interfered with by tack then this can reduce the ability of the horse or pony to perform as required. However smaller, flatter sarcoids may not interfere with ridden work. A brood mare with sarcoids on her udder may resent a foal feeding from her udder.

The other main consideration is expense and possible consequences on insurance for veterinary cover. Treatment of sarcoids can be costly (and is not always straight forward) and insurance companies will usually not insure the horse for treatment of these if he/she is purchased with sarcoids already present.