

Sedation ~ Understanding and accepting the risks

Sedation involves the administration of drugs that alter the level of consciousness of the horse and its ability to perceive the effects of surgical and other procedures. Sedation may be necessary to ensure animal welfare, pain relief and safety.

The level of sedation achieved and the amount of drugs given varies between horses. Some are more sensitive than others. Sedated horses can also be very unpredictable and they should never be assumed to be totally safe.

Light sedation

Can help to take the "edge" off a horse but they are still able to react if need be to various stimulation.

Medium sedation

The horse appears sleepy and calm and the head becomes lower. They very rarely will fall over at this level. Usually used for dental procedures, x-rays and scanning tendons and ligaments.

Heavy sedation

Appropriate for more involved standing surgeries and dental work. The horse may sway but should not lose balance. Normally the horse will be restrained in stocks if available.

Complications

All sedative procedures of horses have the following potential complications: anaphylactic ("allergic") reaction, collapse, excitement, iatrogenic injury.

The consequences of a horse suffering one or more of these conditions can range from minor to fatal, depending on the degree to which the horse is affected and the organ system involved.

Occasionally, and in spite of all precautions, horses suffer one or more of these complications when they undergo sedation. This most commonly occurs when the horse is already suffering from disease or injury, is very young, is an older animal or has an "excitable" temperament; however it can also happen to horses which appear fit and healthy and show no signs of compromise prior to anaesthesia.

Allergic Reaction: Horses can have an allergic reaction to any medication they receive. The extent of the reaction can range from mild skin wheals to collapse, inability to breathe and death (anaphylaxis).

Collapse: Individual horses may be more sensitive than expected to the effects of sedative drugs and may stumble or fall when sedated. This can result in injury to the horse and/or handler.

Excitement: Sedative drugs can occasionally result in an excitement reaction in the horse. These reactions can range from mild muscle trembling to frenzied, uncontrollable activity and severe injury.

Iatrogenic Injury: Any procedure involving horses, especially young, unhandled and fractious animals can result in accidental injury to the horse.

Recovery From Sedation

Horses can recover very quick from sedation and may require top-ups of some drugs. Others may take longer to come around. Food should be withheld for approximately 45minutes or until they are alert enough to be able to eat to avoid any choke. Profuse sweating may be a side effect and so temperature of the environment needs to be taken into consideration and either the horse washed down or kept warm and dry and away from draughts. Muscle tremors can be a normal side effect and shouldn't warrant much cause for concern. Sedation can cause the gastrointestinal tract to slow down and therefore fecal output following sedation should be monitored to avoid any colic complications.

FEI Rules

There are also strict rules on sedating competition horses. Detection times and withdrawal times vary between drugs and so please check with you veterinarian before sedating.

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Equibreed veterinarians are aware of the risks and potential consequences of sedation and act to manage these risks as far as is practically possible.

By engaging our services you agree to our general terms and conditions and therefore understand and accept the above risks associated with the procedures.



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