

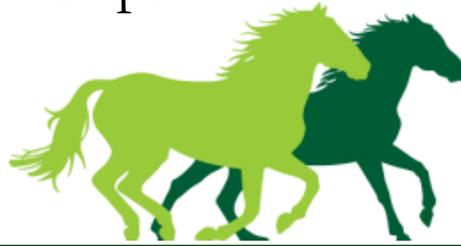
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Corneal Ulceration

What is an ulcer?

An ulcer is created when the surface of the eyeball, the cornea is abraded or scratched (eg. a twig in a hedge). Essentially the surface layer has been removed.

When fluorescein dye is added to the eye, a normal healthy cornea remains clear. When an ulcer is present, a green mark is produced, as shown opposite:

Initially an ulcer is not usually infected. However when an ulcer is present, bacteria can adhere to the exposed deeper layers of the cornea more easily and infection results.



What are the signs to look out for?

Mainly look for a painful eye: It may be closed or squinting, especially in bright light. The eye will tend to run with tears, and you may spot some discharge. If the eye is open the membranes may look red and swollen. In some cases you may see a fuzzy grey-blue spot where the ulcer is on the cornea.

What action should I take?

On the whole, any closed eye or red and swollen eye should be seen by a veterinary surgeon. Optrex or cold tea may help mild conjunctivitis, but will do nothing for an ulcer.

What is the treatment?

1. *Stabling:* Preferably in dimmed light and apply a whole face fly mask. Flies will be attracted to a weepy eye and can spread a secondary bacterial infection.
2. *Antibiotics:* These are usually prescribed by the vet as a cream or solution. Creams need to be applied to the eye less frequently (usually twice daily), whereas solutions are used in more severe cases and need to be applied at least 4 times daily.
3. *Serum:* Several of the chemicals in the horse's own tears that should act as natural anti-inflammatories can start to dissolve the surface of the cornea if ulceration is severe. To prevent this, blood can be taken from a vein and processed in our laboratory to produce special eye drops. The resultant solution contains various inhibitors that neutralize the chemicals in tears.
4. *Painkillers:* Bute is helpful to make the patient more comfortable, stop it rubbing the damaged eye and assist in making the process of applying medication to the eye easier.
5. *Atropine:* Frequently, due to the pain of the ulcer, the pupil goes into spasm and constricts. Atropine is occasionally used to dilate the pupil, but its effects last for a couple of weeks.

When can I stop medication?

The eye should be checked weekly by the veterinary surgeon, but once there is no green staining with the dye, medication can be reduced carefully, whilst monitoring for any signs of returning pain.

