

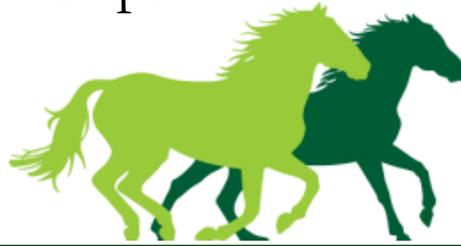
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Sweet-itch

What is it?

Sweet-itch is an itchy skin disease triggered by midges. An allergic reaction results from the midges' saliva when they feed. The resultant inflammation results in itchiness with rubbing and biting.

When does it occur?

The condition results whenever midges are active and feeding, and as Dorset is relatively mild the midges are active most of the year. Particularly bad times are March to October. If the temperature falls below about 5°C the midges die and the condition may resolve.

Are all horses and ponies affected?

Any equidae (horse, pony or donkey) can be affected, but native ponies seem particularly prone. There is some evidence that there is a genetic susceptibility; so an affected mare is more likely to have a foal that develops the disease.

What are the signs?

Essentially the horse will have itchy skin and rub or bite itself. Typically the skin either side of the mane (see photo opposite) and/or at the top of the tail is affected. Less commonly the face or belly may be inflamed.

The damage that the horse inflicts will manifest as: hair loss, abrasions, weeping sores, and thickened scaly skin.



How can we manage the condition?

A. Prevention:

Stopping the midges biting will obviously avoid the problem, but this is not so easy practically.

- *Insect repellents*– These are not 100% effective but will reduce the number of bites. In an ideal world they should be applied more than just twice daily but this is not always possible. **Spray Gold Deet** contains Diethyl-toluamide which is a very effective insect repellent and is probably the best product to try initially. It is currently stocked at the surgery.
- *Stabling*– Midges tend to feed about an hour either side of dawn and dusk, and stabling during these hours can help significantly.
- *Grazing management*- Wherever possible try to keep horses in pastures away from streams and stagnant water where midges breed. For example, more open/windy pastures will have less midges.

- *Boett blanket*– This covers the main areas to be bitten by midges (see photo opposite) and is designed to be left on 24 hours a day. They can also be used during exercise. Many owners are often unwilling to use these blankets as they feel it is unnatural to have the coat covered all the time. However the Boett blanket is probably the best way to prevent Sweet Itch; it will not work properly once the allergy has been triggered.

Details of the blankets are available on the following website:

<http://www.sweet-itch.co.uk/boett.html>

They cost between about £150-180 and last up to 3 years.



B. Treatment of skin inflammation:

- Topical anti-inflammatories– fuciderm, mudfever ointment
- Soothing shampoos-episoothe, tea tree, aloe vera
- Fatty acids
- Anti-histamines
- Vaccination??

Could my horse or pony have another problem?

About 90% of itchy ponies do have Sweet Itch but other diseases can result in similar itchy skin problems. Some examples include:

1. Other allergies– Usually fly bites but could include food or contact allergies.
2. Skin parasites– Mainly lice, but could be ringworm or rainscald.