



## Woodside & Woodside North Equine Clinic Equine Health Times

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## The Top 3 Things Veterinarians Are Looking for in a Neurologic Exam:

By Kara Brown, VMD

### Red Maple Toxicity

Be aware! Now that leaves are falling from the trees, make sure you know what kind of leaves your horses are eating! Red Maple leaf toxicity occurs when horses consume the wilted leaves or bark of red maples, pictured below on the right. Pictured on the left is a sugar maple leaf, which is commonly mistaken for a red maple.

Equine neurologic disease is a sometimes confusing topic for horse owners and veterinarians alike. The diagnosis of neurologic disease presents a great challenge to the equine practitioner, and oftentimes requires numerous diagnostics and interpretation of subtleties. However, the neurologic exam is the first and most basic diagnostic we as practitioners use. In this article I will briefly summarize the major things that we as veterinarians look for during our neurologic exam.

But first, why do we perform neurologic exams? The major reason for the neurologic exam is to gather data that will help us **localize** the disease to one or multiple areas of the nervous system. Specific neurologic problems will indicate malfunction in a different area of the nervous system, and therefore a different set of neurologic diseases. Though the neurologic exam does not always pinpoint one specific area of disease, even knowing that the disease is affecting many areas (multifocal disease) can be important in narrowing down our list of differential diseases. This in turn can direct us to the best way to treat the horse, or to other diagnostics we might want to perform before starting treatment.



Eating these parts of the tree causes hemolytic anemia, or break down of the red blood cells. Signs of red maple leaf toxicity includes lethargy, pale mucous membranes, elevated heart rate and red-brown urine. If you are concerned that your horse may have ingested this leaf and is showing signs of toxicity, please call Woodside Equine Clinic.

### What has our staff been up to?

Dr. Jonathan Hirsch attended a meeting presented by the Virginia Association of Equine Practitioners where Dr. David Frisbee presented the latest information on joint therapy.

Dr. Meg Hammond attended the VVMA board meeting in Blacksburg, VA

Dr. Claudia True and Dr. Meg Hammond attended the VVMA mentor/mentee meeting in Blacksburg, VA

Read about the lives of our veterinary interns in their blog

With that said, here are 5 of the top things we as veterinarians look for during our neurologic exam in a horse:

#### 1. Mentation:

- The first thing we as veterinarians observe when we are looking at a potentially neurologic horse is their **mental state**. How are they behaving in the stall? Are they interacting normally with other horses and people? Normal horses should be bright, react quickly to noise or movement, and should be interested in their surroundings. Horses that do not have normal mentation will be uninterested, and appear dull or sedate. The breed and normal temperament of the horse should also be taken into account, as some horses and breeds are naturally more reactive than others (for instance, an Arabian stallion will usually be more attentive and reactive than a Quarter Horse gelding) A dull mentation signifies possible neurologic disease in the **brain or brainstem**.

#### 1. Cranial Nerves:

- The next part of the neurologic exam that veterinarians focus on is the cranial nerves. Cranial nerves come directly **from the brain and brainstem**, and innervate muscles, skin and other structures on the head. They perform a number of different functions including vision, movement of the facial muscles, movement of the tongue and swallowing, and a number of other tasks. There are a total of **12 cranial nerves**, each with a different function. We as veterinarians test each of the cranial nerves by performing a series of exams, including touching the face to see if the horse has normal feeling, making sure that the horse can chew and swallow normally, and making sure that the horse can see normally. Problems with the cranial nerves can indicate a problem with the nerve itself, or with the area of the brain or brainstem where the nerve originates.

#### 1. Gait and posture

- Watching the horse move is a very important part of the neurologic exam, and one that will commonly give equine veterinarians good information about what may be troubling your horse. In addition, changes in the horse's gait may be the first sign to owners that their horse is experiencing problems. For instance, an owner may report that their horse appears "drunk" or uncoordinated. In medical terms, this is called **"ataxia"**, or a **lack of coordination** of movements. We as equine practitioners test a horse's gait and posture by observing them outside the stall in a series

Diaries of a Veterinary  
Intern

by:  
Dr. Megan Mathias  
and  
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of obstacles. For instance, not only will we watch the horse walk, but will also ask the horse to walk in tight circles, up and down hills, in a serpentine pattern, and with its head in the air. Each of these will challenge the horse's ability to move in a coordinated way, and can sometimes help us identify more subtle changes. To help communicate with each other, the veterinary community has developed a system by which to objectively grade ataxia. Each horse is assigned a number, much like we do in lameness, which correlates to the degree of severity of the ataxia or incoordination. Our grading system has 5 grades, with grade 0 being a normal horse and grade 5 indicating that the horse is recumbent (down) and cannot get up.

I hope this helps make the major parts of our neurologic exam more clear! For more a more in depth explanation of the full neurologic exam, please refer to our home page, [Woodside Equine Clinic](#), in the article entitled "The Equine Neurologic Exam".

If you have any questions or if you think your horse may be showing signs of neurologic disease, please contact **Woodside Equine Clinic at (804) 798-3281** or **Woodside North Equine Clinic (540) 423-3100** to speak with a veterinarian or schedule an appointment.

## Blog: Diaries of a Veterinary Intern

### *Common Topical Wound Treatments*

### *The Helpful vs. The Harmful?*

*Megan Mathias, DVM*

The September blog post entitled "Wound Cleaning - What to Have on Hand and What to Toss Out" discussed products for the cleaning of superficial wounds. This month's blog post is a follow up to that and discusses some of the most commonly used over the counter and prescription wound ointments. Some of these topicals are supported by research and have shown to be effective at promoting wound healing, while others are either unsupported, ineffective, or can even be harmful to tissues. Wounds which are surgically closed with sutures do not typically require a topical antimicrobial ointment but we do commonly recommend topicals for aid in treatment of open cuts, scrapes, and wounds. The best topical dressing is one which is water soluble, non drying, non irritating, and does not delay wound healing. Read on for descriptions of some of the more commonly used topical treatments and find out which are

helping your horse and which may be damaging!

...To read more about , please visit [\*Diaries of a Veterinary Intern\*](#) at Woodside Equine Clinic's website.

Our practice devotes its charitable giving efforts to the AAEP foundation. The foundation is committed to supporting education, research and benevolent efforts for horses and their caretakers. If you'd like more information or to donate to the Foundation you can visit the website at [AAEP Foundation](#).



**Sincerely,**

Woodside & Woodside North Equine Clinic