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Equine Cushing’s Disease Worksheet

*Directions: Answer the following questions based on your knowledge from the presentation.*

1. What causes Equine Cushing’s Disease? What are the specific results of this on the horse’s body functions?

Cushing’s disease occurs when a tumor called a pituitary adenoma develops in the pituitary gland. This tumor sends inappropriate signals to the rest of the body to secrete excessive hormones like cortisol. Too much cortisol in a horse’s body can weaken the immune system which makes them susceptible to infection.

1. List 3 symptoms that a horse with Equine Cushing’s disease may experience? What is the most noticeable symptom?

List any three of these symptoms: Laminitis, weight loss, ulcers in the mouth, excessive thirst, excessive urination, hirsutism and abnormal shedding, changes in body shape, prone to infection, and depression or lethargy. The most noticeable symptom found in Cushing’s disease is Hirsutism where the horse doesn’t properly shed its coat.

1. Describe methods to treat/manage this disease. Be sure to indicate whether or not it can be cured.

-Answers may vary -

Only the symptoms of Cushing’s disease can be treated or managed. Pergolide is said to be the most popular choice of medication to treat Cushing’s disease in horses. Pergolide controls the output of the hormone ACTH, which in turn controls the cortisol levels in the body. The best way to manage Cushing’s disease is to feed horses with low soluble carbohydrate-content feed and forage to limit how much the diet stimulates blood sugar and insulin levels. No, this disease cannot be cured.