

## Choke

Choke is when something becomes lodged in a horse's esophagus and the horse cannot swallow. It is caused when a horse attempts to swallow poorly chewed food or "gobbles" its food. Food matter becomes trapped in the gullet and the horse is not able to swallow though it can breathe.

Signs of choke often include large amounts of slimy, green discharge with food particles coming from the nostrils or frothy white salivation from nose and mouth. The horse may stand still in his stall with his neck outstretched making repeated attempts to swallow. Other signs include coughing and blowing of feed and saliva. Signs of distress such as sweating or other colic-like symptoms may occur. It may be possible to see or feel the obstruction near the gullet.

If choke occurs, remove all food. Many veterinarians recommend offering the horse some water to drink. Water may help to dislodge the obstruction.



If the blockage continues, call your vet immediately. A veterinarian can try to remove the blockage by administering a sedative or spasmolytic injection to relax the esophagus then lavage the food particle to gently flush it out. This process can take hours because great care needs to be taken to avoid damaging or rupturing the esophagus.



During the choke the horse, risks breathing feed into his lungs which can lead to pneumonia or infection. Your veterinarian will probably prescribe antibiotics for 7-10 days afterwards to prevent this.

Afterwards the horse may become more susceptible to choke due to irritation and swelling of the esophagus so it should be monitored closely for several days after experiencing a choking episode. Choke can be prevented by placing softball sized rocks in the horse's feed to slow it down while eating. Treats, such as carrots, should be cut into small pieces (not over 1/2 inch).

Many horses experience stomach ulcers due to stomach acid build up caused by stress from the choke. If the horse is not interested in finishing its feed after a choke episode, it may be experiencing ulcers. HPS gives a horse a 1/2 cup of aloe vera juice over its feed morning and evening for 7 days after a choke. Aloe vera juice can be found at many super stores.