

## Avondale Veterinary Group

**Avondale House  
Strathaven Rural Centre  
Strathaven  
Lanarkshire  
ML10 6SY**

**Tel: 01357 520251**



## Sweet itch

Sweet itch is an allergic reaction to bites from midges (culicoides), black flies and stable flies characterised by severe irritation along the mane and tail. This irritation leads to hair loss due to the rubbing and secondary skin infections.

Insect hypersensitivity (allergy) is the most common cause of equine pruritus (itchiness). There are 4 contributing causes;

1. The bite itself.
2. An immediate (type 1) hypersensitivity to salivary antigens of the biting insect.
3. A delayed (type 4) and cutaneous basophil hypersensitivity reaction similar to flea allergy dermatitis in dogs.
4. Langerhans' cells and T-lymphocytes cytokines production

All of the above interact to enhance release of inflammatory substances.

The tendency to develop insect hypersensitivity (allergies) seems to have many causes, evidence suggests that insect hypersensitivity may be 35% inherited. Certain breeds including Welsh ponies, Connemaras, Arabs, Icelandics and Shires seem to be predisposed but this author's experience suggests that any breed is susceptible. 5% of horse in the UK could be affected with summer allergies. The peak months appear to be April and May but itchiness may start in March and can continue through to September. Maintaining healthy skin in horses out at grass can be a real challenge, especially as no one product seems to offer a complete solution.

### Management

- Avoid stabling horses near stagnant water, manure or compost heaps, boggy fields. If possible move horse onto a windy site. e.g. a bare hillside or a coastal site with strong breezes.
- Ensure fields are well drained, away from muck heaps, compost heaps.
- Consider stabling during periods of dawn and dusk when midge feeding is at its peak.

- Mesh screens on stable doors and windows to keep midges out. Mounting an electric fan to create increased air movement within the stable is VERY effective.
- A protective sweet itch rug may help, particularly if turn out is compulsory Boett® veterinary blanket is particularly successful, covering the horse from nose to tail.
- Suitable fly control in the stable
- Insect repellents -We recommend and supply SWITCH® pour on
- Corticosteroids remain the most useful product of alleviating symptoms quickly. They are very potent anti-inflammatories which will stop the itching and allow the skin to heal. However they have side effects and are therefore are not a long term solution.
- Anti histamines are not as useful in the horse as they are in humans. They tend to be expensive particularly as high doses are required and on their own are not particularly effective.
- As midges dislike contact with grease or oil they will avoid coats coated in this or similar substances. This is effective for a limited time only. Re application 2-3 times daily is required. Greases stay on the coat longer but are messy and not ideal for the ridden show horse.
- Fidavet Cavellese® is a natural food supplement containing water-soluble nicotinamide, which is formulated to maintain healthy skin in those horses prone to allergies at turn out. It comes as an oral solution, given daily with a small amount of food and a gel to be applied to affected areas.

#### Cavalesse- mode of action

- Inhibits histamine release from mast cells
- Minimises and moderates the extent of the inflammatory response by reducing
  1. Leukocyte migration to the skin
  2. Release of inflammatory enzymes
  3. Antibody production from lymphocytes
  4. Release of vasoactive amines
  5. Increases lipid in the epidermal cells to improve the permeability barrier

Recommendations- Use Cavalesse early in the season as possible before any itching begins- in some cases this may be as early as February

Sweet itch is a welfare issue and ignoring your horse's plight is not an excuse. Attempts MUST be made to alleviate the symptoms in your horse. Prevention of the horse rubbing on something by the use of electric fencing is not acceptable

No one product seems to offer a complete solution. Don't give up!!