



FACTSHEET

Abdominal Ultrasound

Ultrasound is a very useful additional tool when examining horses with symptoms of abdominal pain, weight loss or diarrhoea. There are many things that an abdominal ultrasound can tell us. Due to the large size of the horse's abdomen it is impossible to scan all of the abdominal organs in their entirety, we are however able to examine many structures within it. The most common organs that are imaged are the:

- ³⁵/₁₇ **Liver** – This is often imaged prior to taking a biopsy sample.
- ³⁵/₁₇ **Kidneys** – These are often looked at when horses are demonstrating signs of urinary or kidney disease. They can be imaged per rectum or trans-abdominally. Kidney disease is unusual in horses.
- ³⁵/₁₇ **Bladder** – This is often imaged when there is a suspicion of cystitis or bladder stones (urolithiasis), the bladder can also be examined internally by endoscopy.
- ³⁵/₁₇ **Spleen** – The spleen is rarely diseased but can be enlarged in certain conditions and can also be a cause of colic due to nephrosplenic entrapment, where a piece of intestine becomes trapped by the ligament between the kidney and the spleen.
- ³⁵/₁₇ **Intestines** – These are examined to check for motility (increased or decreased) and also any inflammation or blockage within the intestines. Conditions such as intususception, a cause of colic can be diagnosed on ultrasound examination.
- ³⁵/₁₇ **Peritoneal Tap** – This is when a sample of the fluid that bathes the abdominal organs is taken. Ultrasound makes this procedure much more accurate. Peritoneal fluid analysis can tell us whether inflammation is due to infection, neoplasia or an immune mediated problem.

Ultrasound examination is a useful adjunctive test for horses, although it is rarely used in isolation. If your horse requires an ultrasound then it is likely that other tests will be performed at the same time. Common accompanying tests are **gastroscopy, glucose absorption testing, blood sampling** and **faecal worm egg counts**.

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