

Ringbone

Ringbone, a lameness disease of the pastern and coffin joints, is a degenerative disorder that has no cure. Once the condition occurs, it's always there and will progressively worsen. Fortunately, with treatment and good management, disease progression can be slowed, allowing the horse to remain competitive.

Ringbone is a circumferential enlargement that occurs at the level of the pastern joint or coffin joint. High or upper ringbone refers to the condition when it affects the pastern joint, and low ringbone refers to the condition when it affects the coffin joint. Ringbone is similar to arthritis, with the affected area showing bony spur formation and evidence of degenerative joint disease (DJD).



Position of upper and lower ringbone

Traditionally, ringbone is subdivided into periarticular and articular ringbone. Horses with periarticular ringbone have bone spurs near the joint surface, but these spurs do not affect joint structures. Articular ringbone involves the cartilage or synovium. The disease occurs in front and hind legs, but is more commonly seen in the front.

Ringbone has many causes. The most prevalent include injury, sudden or chronic strain from athletic activity, and irregular conformation. Horses with upright legs and foals with uncorrected, inwardly crooked legs from the fetlock down have greater forces placed on the pastern or coffin joints, consequently increasing their risk for ringbone.

The same is true of young horses suffering from osteochondrosis (OCD), a common developmental bone disease which can damage the cartilage in the pastern joint. In rare cases, injection of medications or anesthetics into the coffin or pastern joint can cause infection, which then might lead to ringbone in the joint.

The first sign of ringbone an owner usually sees is lameness. The tissue around the area may be soft and painful. But as the condition becomes chronic, the soft tissue around the joint becomes very firm, very cool, and there's no pain on palpation. In chronic cases, horses might have swelling around the pastern or on top of the coronet band associated with the coffin joint. Diagnosis is based on the history of the problem, external appearance, palpation, and Xrays.

Prognosis depends on the severity of the disease. Ringbone can sometimes be managed for many years, if you treat the horse and are careful with use and shoeing, but it is a degenerative condition, so it will progress. In many cases, the end result is chronic lameness.

The foundation of treatment is rest but treatment is also dependent on the cause, and the stage at which it is diagnosed. Early detection and treatment can help manage and prolong the horses usefulness.



Advanced Ringbone