

## **DISEASES AFFECTING THE HAIR OF HORSES**

Your worst nightmare has come true, your horse or pony just days ago had a full coat of hair and nice skin and now you look at them and they either have dry scaly skin, or have patches of hair missing. These symptoms are tied to many possible ailments. Learn how to take care of them.

You will need to assess the horse to find out what the problem is. An assessment would include the area of skin it is affecting the most, when it began, if there are other horses that are affected, and if the horse has any prior medical conditions which may have contributed to this.

### **Itchy with hair loss:**

Many forms of skin conditions in horses and ponies are itchy and flaky conditions where they are itching to the point that they are losing hair. These conditions are due to gnats, horn flies, lice, and mange. There are treatments available for these types of ailments including repellants that you can buy at any supplier that supplies horse products or from your veterinarian, there are powders to treat for lice, sometimes in severe cases the horse will need to be treated with ivermectin which can be purchased through your veterinarian.

These are all alarming conditions to any horse owner and make the animal look terrible, yet all are curable. With the proper bathing and prevention they can be totally eliminated. Most of these conditions, except mange, do not usually require that you keep the animal separate from other animals, just that you should possibly treat all the animals, just to be safe. In the case of mange it may be necessary, if not all of your animals are infected, to separate the one that is infected, until it is cured of the mange.

### ***Biting Gnats***

Biting Gnats feed on the belly, inner thighs, poll, mane, withers, and tailhead. The irritation will cause the horse to scratch on anything around it. This can cause them to actually "rub" the hair out.

### ***Onchocerca***

Another condition called "Onchocerca" infestation is another very irritating condition in horses, but this is not so common an ailment since ivermectin has all but eliminated it.

### ***Horn Fly***

Horn Fly bites will also cause horses to rub to the point of hair loss.

### ***Pediculosis***

Lice or Pediculosis will not immediately cause hair loss but will eventually irritate the animal enough to rub the hair out and cause skin irritation. You can take a magnifying glass and put it up to your horse's hair and you will be able to see lice if they are present.

## ***Mange***

Mange is identified by examining skin scrapings under a microscope. This is a very itchy condition and can be treated with topical chemicals which you should contact your veterinarian about.

## **HAIR LOSS AND NO ITCHING:**

Some skin conditions occurring in horses and ponies characterized as hair loss with no itching.

## ***Alopecia***

One skin ailment, whose symptoms are hair loss without itching, is alopecia. This condition occurs due to inflammation in the skin and hair follicles and not itching.

## ***Ringworm***

Ringworm is an ailment which is fungal. Lesions appear scaly and crusty. Diagnosis is usually made by a fungal culture. You should bathe animal daily for the first week then bathe two times a week to control infection. The best treatment contains tamed iodine shampoos, chlorhexidine shampoos, dilute bleach .5% solution, rinses, 5% lime sulfur solutions, and fungal orchard spray as a rinse.

When bathing with shampoos, work shampoo into skin and allow it to soak for at least 15 minutes before rinsing. There are also many topical salves and ointments on the market which contain miconazole, clotrimazole, and thiabendazole. In severe cases such as the immuno-suppressed or very young horse, systemic antifungal medication may be the treatment needed.

## ***Skin Scald***

Skin Scald is also another type of hair loss without itching it occurs on the lower legs and is usually due to poor hygiene in the area the horse is kept.

Rain Scald is yet another condition which occurs in areas of high moisture. This is usually diagnosed with a biopsy from a skin scraping from the affected animal.

## ***Seasonal Alopecia***

Sometime in the spring a horse or pony can experience seasonal alopecia where large patches of hair shed and the new hair growth is not present yet, this leaves bald patches on the animal and new hair will grow within a month.

## ***Sarcoids***

Equine skin cancer also known as "Sarcoids" is in this category also, they are not painful but may be infective from one horse to another. This condition will need to be treated by your veterinarian.

### ***Selenium Toxicity***

Some horses' develop a Selenium Toxicity where soil is rich, if this is the problem the grazing area or type of feed will need to be changed.

With so many skin problems in horses, the best form of diagnosis for any of the many would be to have your veterinarian biopsy the skin. The test is simple and gives minimal discomfort to the animal. This article has outlined some of the common ailments and what to do about them. Always consult your veterinarian as skin conditions may take on several forms and are difficult to diagnose on your own.