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Nasal Congestion

Dr. Christine King

Question:

Occasionally my horse will have his head down eating grass and have a wheezing sound as he breaths in. Can he have nasal congestion as we can? He does not have any discharge from his nostrils. Should I be concerned about the wheezing? It is not constant. Thank you very much for any information that will keep my horse feeling well and happy in his "other than young" years.

Answer:

Yes, a horse can develop nasal congestion (swelling in the lining of the nasal passages) when his head is down. However, it is not common and usually is associated with some type of hypersensitivity reaction to something he's inhaled or otherwise come in contact with.

There are several other causes for abnormal breathing noises during inspiration, though. They range from the benign to the scary. To know which one you may be dealing with and how it is best managed, you'd need to have his upper airways properly evaluated using endoscopy +/- radiography.

As your boy's wheezing is inconsistent, it puts allergy among the top contenders. I'd suggest you start noting the circumstances under which you hear the wheezing noise. For example, is it with just a certain patch of grass or just at certain times of year? Are you noticing it more frequently as time goes on? These tidbits of information can be very important in determining what is causing the noise and what, if anything, needs to be done about it.

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