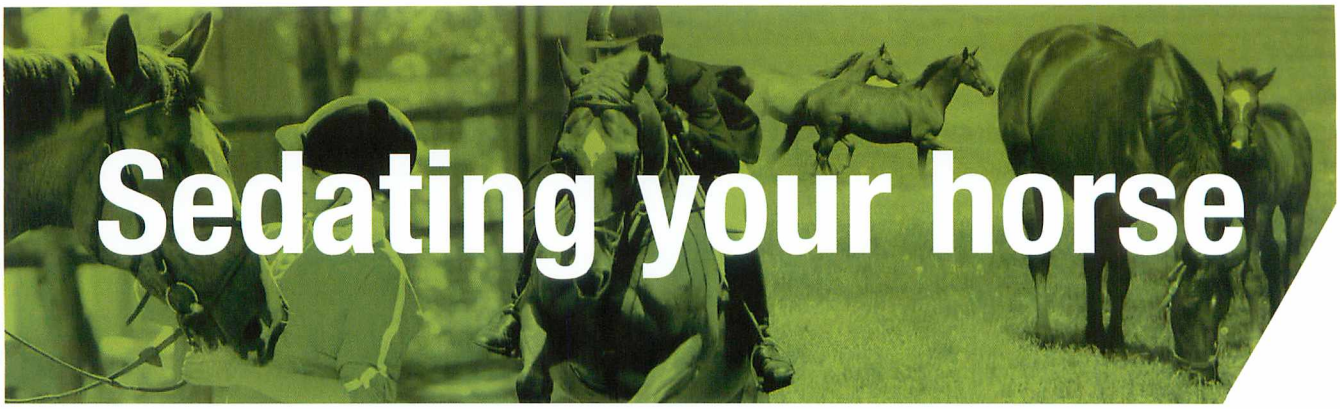
VETEQ NOTE #4 P1



Sedating your horse

WHY SEDATE YOUR HORSE?

At some time in its life, your horse may need a sedative. Be it while the horse is having dental work, during clipping or when having veterinary treatment.

Sedation lessens the activity of the brain by producing muscle relaxation and reducing excitement. This allows treatment to be carried out or reduces the risk of further injury, for example, when a horse is turned out in the field after a period of box rest.

It is often used to minimise distress to the horse. Differing levels of sedation are provided depending on the situation required. Modern sedatives, when administered correctly, can be used safely in horses and side effects are rare. They should always be administered under veterinary direction.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Depending on the level of sedation, you may see your horse react in a number of ways.

Light sedation

Horse appears calmer when being walked in hand, but may still 'spook' at things. The vet may prescribe a light sedative for the owner to administer, with the appropriate dosing instructions. A light sedative is often used for more routine care such as clipping or rehabilitation turnout.

Medium sedation

Horse appears very calm, may have a slight sleepy look and droopy lower lip with head slightly lowered. The horse may appear slightly wobbly, but will rarely fall over unless support is suddenly removed. This level of sedation would most likely be used for dental treatment (administered by a vet not the equine dental technician) or when scanning tendons and ligaments.

Heavy sedation

For this level of sedation the vet will always be present. The horse will be drowsy, have very sleepy-looking eyes, droopy lower lip and hang its head very low to the ground. The horse will sway slightly but should remain standing. For this level of sedation, the horse will ideally be in a confined area on an appropriate surface. This degree of sedation is usually required to conduct more difficult procedures like suturing wounds or more involved dental work.

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AFTER SEDATION CARE

Recovering from sedation

The horse usually recovers from sedation quite quickly but this depends on the type of drug and the degree of sedation. It will need to spend time in a quiet stable. The horse is likely to sweat quite profusely and therefore will need to be placed somewhere relatively draught-free. Don't leave any feed in the stable as under sedation the horse will often try to pick up food and fail to swallow it properly, causing it to choke. Therefore, remove all feed and hay nets and edible bedding.

Once the effects of the sedative have worn off and depending on the treatment received, the horse can return to normal activity but only on the advice of your vet. If your horse is recovering at home and you are worried about its recovery, contact your veterinary surgeon immediately.

Sedating a competition horse

There are strict rules regarding the use of sedatives in competition horses. Always confer with your vet if your horse needs to be treated. Information about detection times (how long it takes for a medicine to clear from a horse's body) can be obtained from your vet, from the Federation Equestre Internationale's (FEI) veterinary department and from the sport's governing bodies.

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