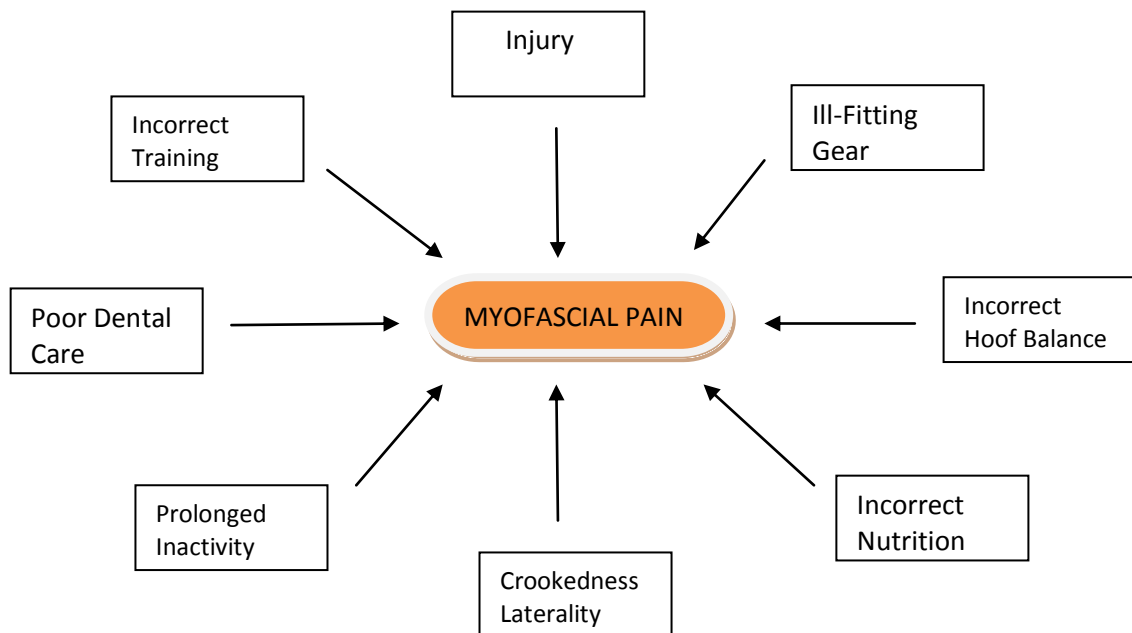


EQUINE MYOFASCIAL PAIN

“The Hidden Reason”

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Myofascial Disease is a chronic, painful condition affecting the muscles and the fascia that surrounds them. It is more common in horses than many people wish to accept and is often the hidden reason behind many poor performance and behavioural issues in a horse's career. It can also affect a horse's biomechanics or way of moving to the point that lower leg structures are put under abnormal wear and tear.



Causes of Myofascial Pain in Horses

Injury, overuse, inactivity such as box rest, incorrect training including inadequate warm-up and cool down, ill-fitting gear, poor dental, hoof or nutritional care may all result in myofascial pain. It may also just develop secondary to the horse's natural crookedness or laterality. Fortunately myofascial pain can be treated but a thorough investigation to identify contributing causes must always be undertaken to prevent a recurrence.

Myofascial Trigger Points

Many people have experienced muscle pain and recognise how limiting and debilitating it can be. One muscle or many muscles may be affected at the same time and these may be painful, weak or stiff. Any skeletal muscle may develop myofascial trigger points which are painful on compression, stretching, overload or contraction. They are very small areas within the muscle that are fixed in a state of compression or involuntary shortening and have been likened to local rigor mortis.

Dry Needling – Treatment of Myofascial Trigger Points

Once identified, Myofascial Trigger Points may be mechanically de-activated by Dry Needling which involves the insertion of very fine, solid needles of varying lengths up to 10cm. A localised twitch response occurs and then the muscle relaxes allowing an increase in blood flow to the area promoting healing and restoring normal function. Horses accept dry needling really well with most just being held in a halter. A major advantage of Dry Needling is that horses can usually remain in work or have minimal time off.

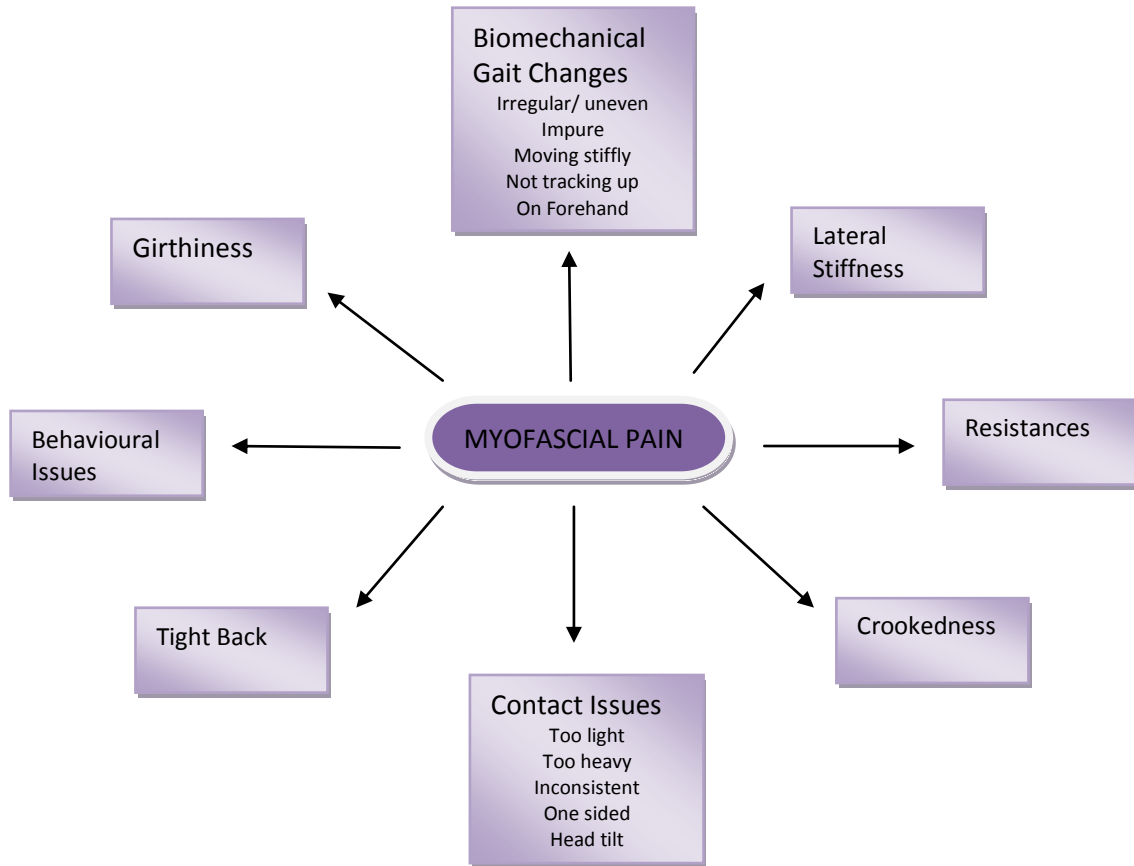


Signs of Myofascial Pain in the Horse

Healthy muscles contract and relax under nerve influence but if damaged, parts may stay contracted and not be able to relax enough, or at all, to allow other muscles in the body to function correctly. This may then set off a chain of reactions, quite often resulting in significant biomechanical changes to the way the horse moves and to how the horse is able to perform the work expected of it.

Any or all gaits may be affected and become irregular and show uneven strides. Horses may appear to move stiffly with a reduced tendency to track up in the trot or over track in the walk. Impure and incorrect paces may develop such as lateral or long/short walks and 4-beat canters. Any of these gait changes must be taken as a strong sign that something is wrong with your horse and a thorough investigation is required.

Sometimes the gaits themselves are normal but the horse is reluctant to transition between them or to even pick them up in the first place. An example is the jumping horse that will no longer land on a particular lead or a dressage horse that has trouble with its flying changes. Lower level horses may show difficulty in striking off on a particular lead or may continually break or disunite in the canter.



Signs of Myofascial Pain in Horses

If particular muscles are blocked, preventing others from being engaged and working correctly, the horse may not be able to answer the training questions asked of it. The level of pain it experiences will depend on the actual muscles affected and how badly affected they are at the time, as well as how much the rider tries to push the horse. The signs will also vary with the temperament and level of training of the horse. This explains the wide range of signs riders and trainers need to be aware of in their daily work with their horses. It is important to remember that the ability of a rider to detect early signs is dependent on their experience, knowledge of that particular horse, feel and empathy.