EQUINE HYPERADRENOCORTICISM

Classic hyperadrenocorticism (Cushing's disease) in horses is caused by an adenoma of the pars intermedia of the pituitary gland. This is a disease of older horses (>7 years) with the most common clinical signs being hirsuitism, weight loss, laminitis, lethargy, PU/PD and hyperhidrosis.

The most commonly recommended test for diagnosis is the 19 hour/Overnight Dexamethasone suppression test.

Procedure for the Overnight Dexamethasone suppression test

1. Collect a baseline blood sample (red top tube) between 4-6pm
2. Administer dexamethasone at 40ug/kg IM (0.04mg/kg) immediately after.
3. Collect the second serum sample at noon the next day (19 - 24 hours post-dexamethasone)
4. Send samples to the laboratory for cortisol analysis

Interpretation of the results

Normal horses should suppress to below 30 nmol/l on the overnight sample.

How good is the test?

In one study, 34 healthy horses all had cortisol levels < 30 nmol/l at 20 – 24 hours post dexamethasone and 52 horses with Cushings had cortisol levels >30 on the post sample.

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