

Lameness Work-ups at B&W Equine Hospital

This information sheet is designed to try and help you, as a horse/pony owner, understand what a lameness work-up at B&W Equine Hospital may entail. Hopefully this will help to reduce the worry you may have about bringing your horse/pony to us.

When a horse/pony is lame, with no obvious cause for the lameness, we often advise a lameness investigation, or 'work-up', to try and determine what the cause of the lameness is.

What does a lameness 'work-up' entail?

- We will allocate a vet to look at your horse/pony. He/she will take some history from you regarding your horse/pony's background, such as
 - What your horse/pony is used for
 - How he/she is managed
 - Shoeing etc
- They will also ask questions about the nature of the current lameness:
 - Duration
 - Severity
 - Previous treatment
 - Response to rest/treatment etc
- We will then perform an initial lameness examination; this may include:
 - Walk and trot in a straight line
 - Flexion tests
 - Lunging on both firm and soft surface
 - Palpation of the limbs/back/neck
 - Possibly a ridden examination, dependent on the history and nature of the problem
- If, following this examination, there is something that suggests a cause of the lameness we may elect to perform the relevant diagnostic imaging procedure straight away
 - X-rays and/or ultrasound examination
- If there is no obvious cause of lameness, then we commonly embark on performing a series of 'nerve blocks':
 - We will place small volumes of local anaesthetic, using small needles, in specific places on the leg to numb the nerve supply to a specific area
 - If your horse/pony is sound after this nerve block then we know that the cause of lameness is coming from somewhere within the numbed region.
 - If your horse/pony remains lame then we will perform the next nerve block up the leg, as we generally start at the bottom of the leg and work our way up

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- Once we have localized the lameness we may:
 - Let the nerve block wear off, so your horse/pony is lame again, and perform a more specific block (e.g. into a joint, tendon sheath, bursa). This helps to provide us with a more accurate localization of the site of pain
 - Take x-rays to look for bony abnormalities
 - Perform ultrasound examination to look for soft tissue abnormalities

How long does a lameness work-up take?

- This is hard to predict!
- It depends on:
 - How quickly we localise the lameness i.e. how many nerve blocks we need to perform
 - If we need to wait for the initial nerve blocks to wear off before we perform more specific blocks
 - If we need to take x-rays and if so how many
 - If we need to perform an ultrasound examination
- You are welcome to stay for as much, or as little, of the lameness work-up as you want.
 - We are happy for you to wait with your horse/pony and we will explain what we are doing with each test.
 - It is common for our vets to be working on more than one case at a time and there are periods of time you will have to wait.
 - E.g. whilst a nerve block is taking time to work (~10 minutes)
 - It is possible for you to drop your horse/pony off with us and not stay if this suits you best.
- Sometimes it may be necessary for your horse/pony to stay with us overnight (if work-up is taking a long time or we want to perform treatment the following day).
 - If this is the case, we will discuss how your horse/pony is managed and provide a husbandry form to be completed to ensure your horse is looked after as you request.

What might we advise following a lameness work-up?

- We would always discuss the outcome of a lameness work-up with you before undergoing any treatment.
- The type of treatment is very dependent on the diagnosis but may include:
 - Medication of a structure with an anti-inflammatory drug
 - E.g. placing steroid into a joint
 - Rest +/- controlled exercise
 - Alterations in shoeing
 - Systemic treatment with an anti-inflammatory (e.g. 'bute')
 - Surgery to treat specific conditions and/or to provide us with more diagnostic information

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- We may advise more advanced diagnostic tests to provide us with additional information.
 - E.g. MRI, CT or bone scan (nuclear scintigraphy)

How much does a lameness work-up cost?

- This is very hard to predict as it depends on how many nerve blocks we perform and what other diagnostic tests we do
- It can cost anything from £300+
- Insurance companies generally cover lameness work-ups, unless you have a relevant pre-existing exclusion. It is worth informing your insurance company that your horse/pony is under going a lameness work-up

When wouldn't we do a lameness work-up?

- If there is an obvious cause of lameness that does not require nerve blocking
 - We may still perform x-ray and/or ultrasound with these cases
- If your horse/pony is so lame that we are concerned about making matters worse by walking/trotting around
 - We may elect to x-ray/ultrasound/bone scan/MRI these cases in the first instance
- If there is a history of trauma and there are concerns about a fracture etc
 - We may elect to perform a bone scan with these cases in the first instance.

We hope this helps to explain the lameness work-up procedure but if you have any queries then please contact the hospital on 01453 811867 or enquiries@bwequinevets.co.uk and one of our vets will be happy to talk to you.

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