

# David Ramey, DVM

## **Breed and Age Risks for Laminitis**

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### **Breed**

While there's no particular breed that is genetically programmed to get laminitis more often than others, certain breeds do seem to get the condition more often than others. For example, Morgan horses and donkeys seem to have a tendency to get fat – you have to watch their weight carefully.

You have to be extra careful with ponies. Ponies seem to be especially prone to becoming overweight. This may be because ponies were developed in areas where the natural diet was fairly poor in both quantity and quality; perhaps ponies became “programmed” to easily store fat to get them through lean times. In addition, most people don't really have a good idea of how much ponies really weigh, so it's pretty easy to overestimate how much feed they really need.

Thoroughbreds pose their own particular problem. While they aren't at risk for the disease any more than any other horse, they may tend to be flat-footed and thin-soled, which makes their feet more prone to trauma.

### **Age**

The risk of a horse developing laminitis increases with age. Horses over 15 are at greater risk for the disease most likely because they're the ones that end up having their activity level reduced. In addition, older horses are the ones that develop growths of their pituitary glands (equine Cushing's syndrome). Laminitis can be particularly hard to treat in older horses because there's no cure for old age, nor is there a cure for many of the underlying conditions that they develop (such as Cushing's). On the other hand, laminitis is rare in horses less than two years of age. One exception to this general rule is seen in young horses being prepared for halter classes or yearling sales – these portly little fellows often get a lot of grain pushed to them and may be prone to laminitis due to the combination of obesity, grain overload and (in many cases) lack of exercise.