

Diagnosing Lameness

STEP ONE: Review Medical History

We will ask about past and present difficulties you have had with your horse. The vet will also check about work/exercise requirements and any other relevant information.

STEP TWO: Assessment at Rest

In a visual assessment at rest, the vet will look at conformation, balance, and weight bearing – with particular emphasis on evidence of injury and stress.

STEP THREE: Evaluation in Motion

We will watch the horse walking and trotting and in most cases will be put onto a lunge. Observing the horse from the front, back, and both side views, the vet will note any deviations in gait.

STEP FOUR: Hands on Examination

We will palpate the horse, checking muscles, joints, bones and tendons for evidence of heat, swelling or any other physical abnormalities. Pulses in the blood vessels of the lower limb frequently give useful information about infections or inflammation in this

STEP FIVE: Hoof Tests

Hoof examination normally includes a careful visual inspection of the bearing surface of the foot. Also hoof testers will be used.

STEP SIX: Flexion Tests

Flexion tests help to assess the capsule surrounding joints together with the associated ligaments and tendons and bone ends. The vet holds the limb in a flexed position for a short period and then releases the leg. As the horse trots away the vet watches for signs of increased lameness.

STEP SEVEN: Lunging

Frequently the vet will want to watch the horse being lunged in a circle, particularly on hard ground. This generally puts more pressure on the inside leg (front or back) and makes subtle lameness more obvious.

Furthermore, as vets we may want to watch your horse under saddle which may emphasise or change the presentation of certain lameness which may give us a better indication of where the problem originates.



STEP EIGHT: Nerve/Joint blocks

Local anaesthetic can be used to help isolate the area of lameness by numbing the region and therefore improving the lameness. We call these “nerve blocks”. This can allow the vet to focus expensive imaging tests in the affected area.

Local anaesthetic can also be injected into specific synovial structure (joints) to isolate pain “joint blocks”. Although every precaution is taken by prepping the injection site in a sterile manner there is always a small risk of sepsis (joint infection) which you must be aware of.

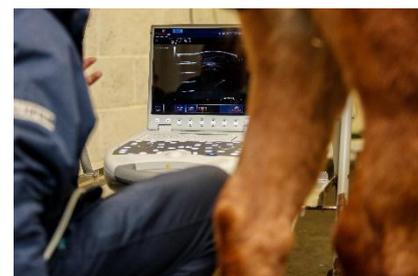


STEP NINE: Diagnostic Imaging

Once the source of the pain has been localised, a range of imaging techniques may be used to further identify the cause.

These usually include ultrasound scans and x-rays.

In more difficult cases sometimes referral may be necessary for further imaging such as scintigraphy, MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) and CT (Computed Topography).



IMPORTANT NOTES:

- A lameness investigation regularly takes two days and therefore it must be expected that your horse will stay with us for this length of time.
- As an owner you are welcome to stay to watch the investigation but may be impractical due to prolonged investigation.
- Veterinarians develop their own protocols in assessing lameness but the steps shown indicate the general process.