

CRIBBING

... and it's meaning for your horse.

By Rowan Emrys, CNMT

My horse cribs and I've tried just about EVERYTHING! What can I do to stop it?

DEFINITION

Well, first thing, let's define what cribbing really is: Cribbing is when a horse hooks it's teeth over an object (usually a fence rail), braces itself and starts sucking air. Some horses are so committed, or addicted to the endorphins released, to cribbing they can even do it by simply arching their necks.

If a horse is merely chewing or licking on wood (looking for phosphorus?) or metal (looking for zinc?), it usually is more of a mineral imbalance and can be handled by balancing the diet with the natural, evolutionary equine diet I suggest on my website or in my HorseSense book plus, ideally, the free-choice Dynamite minerals.

And if a horse is truly cribbing, the same diet and mineral re-balance are also indicated (as for EVERY horse!), but there are specific considerations which need to be looked at.

PREVENTION

Most owners of cribbers try to prevent their cribber from doing the dirty deed by hot-wiring fence, painting it with noxious substances (sort of like parents putting yucky-tasting stuff on their toddler thumb-suckers thumbs or fingers), or even using a "crib-collar." Unfortunately, such "fixes" actually cause the horse far more anxiety and increases the compulsion to crib; the act itself seems to bring relief to cribbers.

In fact, such preventive measures do not address the possible causes of such behavior in the first place and are, in effect, bullying or abusive tactics.

Rather, lets see what we can accomplish by under-

standing possible causes and addressing such causes in a thoughtful way.

CAUSES & ADDRESSING THOSE CAUSES

So what are some of the causes of cribbing and how can we address those causes? Besides appearing to be genetically influenced, generally the main causes of cribbing are:

- Anxiety
- Grain
- Hoof shape
- Hormones
- Ulcer/s

So let's address each of those causes in turn and see what we can do to eliminate them.

Anxiety - Let's face it: horses are prey animals and thus very prone to anxiety. We can add to their anxiety levels by removing them from friends, forcing them into unwanted buddy situations, and just by the act of training. Learning how to read our horse's anxiety signals, mainly those wide, white eyes, can help rectify this but so can nutrition.

Feeding our suggested evolutionary diet of free choice forage (pasture and/or hay), no or low grain, and offering the Dynamite free-choice minerals (preferably with an ounce of Dynamite pellets) such as they would get in nature, can go a long way to supply the minerals necessary for a healthy nervous system.

For those needing more nutritional help, "force-feeding" a couple of ounces of normally free-choice IZMINE can do the trick. Other horses may do best with Easy Boy, Easy Balance or even some Breeder Pac if hormones are an issue. It's amazing

how just some nutritional balancing can have such a profound effect on behavior!

Short term help can frequently be obtained by spraying with either Relax or Tranquil, Dynamite's botanical homeopathic sprays.

Another possibility if anxiety seems to be overwhelming your sensitive horse, and diet and at-free exercise doesn't seem to be having as much effect as you'd like, is to contact a proven animal communicator (ask your friends!) who may be able to zero in on a cause.

Grain - So many performance horses and those in training, receive an over-abundance of grain thus causing an acidic condition in their GI tracts. According to Dr. Joe Pagan of Kentucky Equine Research, Inc., no horse should receive more than .03% of it's body weight in grain at any one feeding (or about 3# for a 1,000# horse), or the grain cannot be digested properly. If you feel that grain is essential for your horse, it is best to feed such grain about 30 minutes or so *after* hay is fed. Eating hay first starts the saliva flowing (thus reducing stomach acid concentration) and takes the edge off the appetite so the grain won't be bolted.

If your horse has been on heavy grain-feeding/ sweet feed, you might consider a good 30-day cleanse with Dynamite Excel. We ourselves feed our horses free-choice hay and rarely feed grain, so we have never had to be concerned about this.

Hoof shape - As a neuromuscular therapist, I am very conscious of just how anatomy can affect digestion. For horses, too low back heels actually straightens the hind leg angles allowing the sacrum to tip forward. This in turn causes the intestines to exert pressure on the diaphragm and the stomach. Apparently cribbing offers some relief. Easy to fix by snubbing up the toes to get proper hoof angles. There's more on proper hoof angles, etc, in my book HorseSense.

Hormones - We're all familiar with "studley" mares and geldings, some of whom may be so anxiety-driven that they crib. Balancing out the nutrition as above is an absolute given in such cases, but we have also seen downright miracles happen when

their basic feed is supplemented with Dynamite Breeder Pac. Despite the name, it's really the best hormone balancer ever for *any* horse requiring it. In fact, it also tends to be very valuable for Metabolic Syndrome or Cushing's horses, too.

Ulcers - Interestingly, a British study has shown a significant correlation between cribbing and ulcers with other studies showing over 80% of horses in training performance having ulcers. So common indeed! Anyone who has had an ulcer can tell you they are painful indeed and apparently for cribbers, this brings relief.

One of the most effective ulcer treatments we've experienced is to feed Dynamite Miracle Clay in between feedings. What generally works well is to mix about 2T of the dried Clay with water in a baggie; let it sit a couple of hours to activate; and then let the horse lick it right out of your hand, his empty feed tub or syringe it directly into the horse's mouth between feedings 2-3x daily. Once the ulcer is soothed, the activated Clay can simply be added to the animal's concentrate as a soothing preventative. You can also add a couple of tablespoons of aloe vera gel to the mix, too, to help soothe the inflammation.

SUMMARY

The main idea to reduce or eliminate true cribbing is to reduce or eliminate the various causes of this behavior in the first place by following the above suggestions. Such a program has helped literally hundreds of other horses and should also be of real value to you and your companion or competitor. For more on the basic evolutionary equine diet, please visit my website, WWW.TARRYALL.NET. While there, do read about my book HorseSense which can be a valuable, in-depth reference for further study.

Rowan Emrys is a Certified Neuro-Muscular Therapist, bred AQHA horses for 45 years, and has been using Dynamite products since 1993. She is one of only three Gold Directors in the entire Dynamite organization.