Thal Equine Client Handout: Giving Your Horse Oral Medications

The most important part of any oral treatment is seeing that your horse or foal gets the total dose of medicine at the prescribed time for the total number of days, as directed by your equine veterinarian. As discussed in greater detail in my article "How to Perform Veterinary Treatments on Your Horse Without Drama," envision this task within the context of your relationship with your horse. It is simply another opportunity to train your horse to do something that you ask of it. Likewise, it is good to practice this skill before it is necessary.

TABLETS

There are two ways to give tablet medication, mixing the tablets with feed or giving it by oral dosing, usually in a modified syringe. The method you select depends on a number of factors, including the likelihood of your horse refusing the medication in the feed, and how effectively he or she can be orally-dosed.

ORAL DOSING OR PASTING

Oral dosing is similar to paste worming. The best technique we have found for difficult horses is to first try to get a single finger in the corner of the mouth. If your horse resents this, practice it until he accepts it. If he accepts it, slide it in a little way and back, to stimulate his tongue. He will usually open his mouth. Be careful to keep your finger from going back far from the corner of his mouth. *You can be bitten severely by the large molars that are further back!* I would be happy to show you this technique in person.

Once the horse relaxes and opens his mouth, gently slide the syringe with medication as far back as possible, while trying to avoid upsetting the horse. Push the plunger when the syringe tip is about at the base of his tongue. For horses that tend to spit out medication, slide the syringe or your finger gently back and forth to stimulate tongue movement. This will tend to stick the medication to the tongue and prevent the horse from spitting it out. Holding the muzzle up after dosing will also discourage spitting out.

Depending upon the medication, some tablets will easily dissolve in water, so just add pills to syringe, then water to fill syringe and shake it a bit. Some tablets will not dissolve in water, so you must crush them first. Ask your veterinarian for specifics. He or she may also suggest that you also add molasses or Caro syrup to improve taste. Some horses resent oral medication, but most tolerate it well. Watch to see if your horse swallows the medication or if it comes back out of the mouth.

MIXING WITH FEED

Some tablets can be mixed with feed, supplements or grain. Some tablets are so small that they can be mixed with the feed without crushing, while others need to be crushed. Larger tablets or boluses can be crushed with a mortar and pestle, or a hammer can be used to crush the tablets wrapped in a small plastic bag. A coffee grinder works well for crushing pills quickly and easily. Mix the powdered tablets into the horse’s feed, as prescribed.

POWDERS & GRANULES

Powders or granules should be mixed directly with the feed. Dampening the feed with molasses makes the mixture more palatable for your horse and keeps powders, granules and small tablets from separating out. Check the bottom of the feed bucket 15-30 minutes after feeding to make sure the entire mixture has been eaten.

Call me if you have any questions or you are having difficulty giving your horse oral medication.

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