

YES, MARES GET 'BEANS' TOO.

The need for horse owners to practise hygiene on their geldings - and at times stallions - is well publicised and many regularly check the sheath - or arrange for professionals to do this - in the search for 'beans'. 'Beans' are an accumulation of smegma, a waxy substance that includes dirt and dead skin cells that accumulates in a pocket just inside the opening of the penis. If left unattended these can interfere with your horse's ability to urinate and can cause discomfort.

Less commonly discussed is the fact that mares also develop 'beans' and there is a need to remove these. We spoke to sheath and mare hygienist, Liz Dutton, from Equine Hygiene UK on this topic.

"It is not uncommon to find 'beans' in mares," explained Liz, "and about nine out of ten mares I clean have them. Age doesn't seem to be a factor in bean prevalence as I've removed fairly large 'beans' from young fillies and have seen many older 'girls' with no 'bean' whatsoever.

"The breed seems to have some bearing on 'bean' production as, for example, the cob/native types appear to be affected more than finer types, although I have seen a few Thoroughbreds with large 'beans' so there are definitely exceptions to this theory!

"Unlike with the formation of gelding beans, diet does not seem to be a factor in the formation of mare 'beans'."

Signs your mare has a bean problem

"Most mares do not present with any obvious signs, but clients have reported the following changes once the bean has been removed:

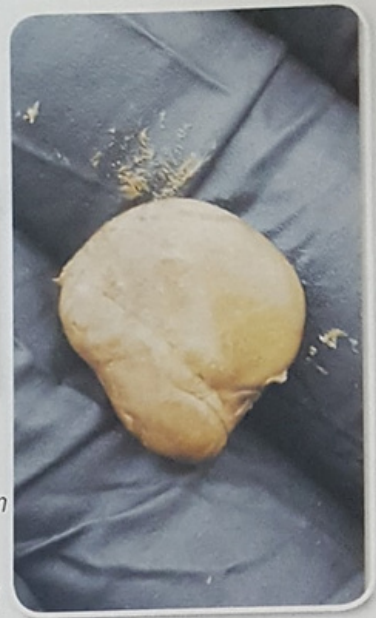
- reduced/absence of tail rubbing
- improved temperament
- mare has stopped groaning/hesitating when urinating.

"One of the benefits of checking for beans is that you can check the vulva and vestibule (the area just inside the vulva) for early signs of disease. While not qualified to diagnose or treat any of these I can advise the owner to seek veterinary advice or treatment if I find anything unusual, before it becomes more difficult (and expensive) to treat.



Top: Udder smegma is a waxy residue that builds up around a mare's udder. When it hardens it can form thick flakes like in the image above.

Right: A mare 'bean' can be around 1 to 2 cm.



"Common problems I see include Equine papilloma virus (small blister-like papules that can progress to squamous cell carcinoma) and signs of squamous cell carcinoma itself (cauliflower-like growths or areas of non-pigmented skin, often with a slimy discharge)."

Finding the 'beans'

"Beans are located within a little sac inside the vulva called the clitoral fossa. The bean sits deep within the sac so it has to be gently massaged to the surface.

"This process is something many mare owners can do themselves but it is important to clean the dock area thoroughly beforehand and ideally wear nitrile gloves to avoid accidental bacterial infection/UTI.

"Because you have to position yourself directly behind the mare while you work on her 'sensitive bits' there is a risk that you may be kicked so appropriate safety measures, such as a crush, will help decrease the risk. It's probably best to attempt this initially under sedation, or leave it for your vet/hygienist to do.

"Most 'beans' I have found are approximately one centimetre in diameter, with the largest being two centimetres.

"As with geldings, some mares cannot tolerate even small 'beans' whereas others don't seem to be bothered by them at all. If your mare has a particularly large bean or she is very sensitive, this could have an impact on her performance (think of an athlete with a stone in their shoe - it would be distracting and irritating)."



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Equine Hygiene UK is a dedicated, professional sheath and mare hygiene service to promote optimum health, wellbeing and performance. Inspired by her own horses, Liz Dutton is totally committed to providing a professional yet affordable sheath and mare hygiene service in and around North West England and North Wales.

Web: www.equinehygieneuk.com