How do I care for a blind horse?

We have resources available that will help you and your horse adapt to their blindness. Things to consider include "blind-proofing" paddocks, pasture fencing, stalls and barns. While we cannot recommend riding a blind horse, there are online resources that describe owners successfully retraining their horse using physical and verbal cues.

How to make an appointment

To schedule an appointment for your horse, contact the Large Animal Clinic during regular office hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday) at (530) 752-0290

Any horse with a teary, cloudy, red or squinting eye should receive immediate veterinary care

UC DAVIS
VETERINARY MEDICINE

www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vmth

This brochure does not, in any way, describe or dictate a standard of care. Its purpose is to provide general educational information to the pet-owning public.

"To be blind is not miserable; not to be able to bear blindness, that is miserable."

— John Milton

Veterinary Ophthalmology Service

EQUINE RECURRENT UVEITIS (ERU)

William R. Pritchard
Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital
at UC Davis
What is ERU?
The most common cause of blindness in horses is equine recurrent uveitis (ERU). As the name suggests, ERU is characterized by recurrent episodes of intraocular inflammation. Another common name for this condition is moon blindness. The name moon blindness came about when people erroneously thought the recurrences were in conjunction with cycles of the moon. Appaloosas and draft breeds seem predisposed, but any horse is susceptible.

What are the signs of ERU?
Signs of an acute ERU attack include corneal cloudiness, squinting, redness, swelling, and tearing of the eyes. The severity of the signs and the frequency of the attacks vary among individual horses. Blindness results from cataracts, glaucoma or retinal detachment or degeneration in various combinations. It is not usually one attack that results in blindness, but the cumulative effects of many attacks.

What causes ERU?
The causes of ERU are not completely understood. The disease itself is an immune-mediated disease, but various other factors may be involved, such as: intraocular or systemic infections, corneal injury, trauma or neoplasia. In most cases we do not find the inciting cause.

How is ERU diagnosed?
The diagnosis is made based on history, response to medication and results of the ophthalmic examination by a veterinarian. In some cases, labwork may be submitted to look for systemic disease.

How is ERU treated?
The major therapeutic goals for managing ERU are to preserve vision, aggressively treat inflammation, control pain, and minimize the frequency and severity of recurrences. Any horse with a teary, cloudy, red or squinting eye should receive immediate attention from a veterinarian who can make a definitive diagnosis and initiate treatment. In some cases, horses with ERU that respond favorably to medical therapy may be candidates for a surgical procedure. Veterinary ophthalmologists can surgically implant a medicated “wafer” into the back of the eye. This anti-inflammatory drug is then absorbed slowly over the course of a couple to several years, and typically reduces the number and severity of recurrences.

In patients with severe, blinding, painful inflammation, the eye should be surgically removed (enucleation).