Bog spavin is fluid distension of the high mobility joint in the hock called the tibiotarsal or tarsocrural joint. The swelling can be seen and felt at the two superficial outpouchings of the joint capsule; at the front towards the inside and on the outside just below and in front of the point of the hock. If one swelling is compressed this usually causes the other swelling to enlarge temporarily and vice versa. Bog spavin can occur in one or both hind legs.

**Clinical signs**

Bog spavin is a clinical sign rather than a diagnosis. The swelling is caused by inflammation of the joint lining and an increase in the fluid inside the joint. It should not be confused with bone spavin (firm swelling due to osteoarthritis in the lower joints of the hock) or thoroughpin (where the swelling is at the back of the leg, just above the point of the hock).

Many horses with bog spavin show no lameness and do not require treatment.

Some conditions result in joint inflammation with pain and lameness and these necessitate further investigation in order to allow treatment targeted to the underlying cause.

**Diagnosis**

Investigation of the underlying cause may require diagnostic investigations including:

- nerve blocks
- x-rays
- ultrasound scan
- bone scan
- arthroscopy (keyhole surgery).

**Key Points:**

- Bog spavin is fluid distension of the tarsocrural (tibiotarsal) joint of the hock;
- may be caused by arthritis of the joint, osteochondrosis (OCD), trauma, infection or certain vitamin deficiencies;
- many cases are of uncertain cause classified as idiopathic bog spavin;
- straight hock conformation can predispose horses to bog spavin;
- cases of idiopathic bog spavin usually do not require treatment.

**Clinical Signs**

- difficulty/repeated attempts at swallowing
- stretching/arching of the neck
- coughing
- food & saliva discharging from the nose
- drooling
- disinterest in food
- occasionally a lump may be seen or felt on the left side of the neck.

If you suspect your horse is suffering from choke it is important to prevent your horse from eating as this will make the blockage worse and more difficult to clear.

If the obstruction doesn’t clear quickly of its own accord then veterinary assistance must be sought. There are a number of steps your vet can take to help to confirm and treat the problem.

Horses and ponies with dental problems (that prevent them grinding their food properly), individuals that bolt their food too quickly and those fed dry pelleted or cubed feeds are all at increased risk.

Regular dental check-ups for your horse to reduce the risk of choke as a result of a painful mouth.

**Fact Sheet**

**Straight hock conformation can predispose horses to the condition**

**Choke**

Choke is a relatively common condition seen in horses and ponies and is typically caused by obstruction of the oesophagus (food pipe) with food; occasionally a foreign body can be involved e.g. wood or plastic. Fortunately many cases of choke resolve quickly and spontaneously and only cases in which the obstruction lasts for longer than 30 minutes are likely to require veterinary assistance.

It is important to note that this is not the same as the life-threatening condition in humans, where the term “choke” refers to blockage of the windpipe rather than the oesophagus. This difference means that unlike humans, horses with choke can still breathe.

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**Bog Spavin**

**Treatment**

Treatment will depend upon the underlying cause. Many horses with bog spavin do not require treatment.

- Rest and anti-inflammatory treatment such as phenylbutazone (bute) and topical anti-inflammatory gels can be useful in the early stages.
- Excessive joint fluid can be drained followed by an injection of hyaluronic acid and/or steroid anti-inflammatory into the joint. A support bandage is put on the hock for 2 – 3 weeks to stop the joint from re-filling. This treatment can be repeated if the bog spavin returns, but some horses do not respond and the swelling quickly returns.
- Osteoarthritis can be treated with anti-inflammatory medication administered into the joint.
- Osteochondrosis (OCD) and chip fractures can be treated with arthroscopy (key hole surgery) to remove areas of damaged or loose joint cartilage or bone.
- If vitamin and/or mineral deficiencies are present these need to be corrected. Calcium, phosphorus, Vitamin A and Vitamin D deficiencies are thought to cause bog spavin in some cases.

**Prevention**

Prevention of bog spavin is difficult since the mechanism is poorly understood in many cases, but choosing not to breed from horses with very straight hocks may help to reduce the risk.

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_X-ray showing a large chip fracture in the hock joint which was the underlying cause of Bog Spavin in this horse._

**Fact Sheet**

 REGULAR DENTAL EXAMINATIONS AND TREATMENT CAN REDUCE THE RISK OF CHOKE

**For further information contact your local XLEquine practice:**

www.xlequine.co.uk