

# CRIB-BITING

ZOOL 567 Topic Dissemination By Sara Perry

Crib-biting is an equine stereotypic behaviour, during which a horse grips a surface with its incisors and flexes its neck while pulling backward and sucking in air, producing a characteristic “grunt” [1]. Stereotypic behaviours are abnormal repetitive behaviours with no clear function [2].

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## Is Crib-Biting a Welfare Concern?

Crib-biting does not appear to indicate acute distress in horses, but chronic welfare issues can influence its development and frequency.

Crib-biting is strongly associated with environmental conditions not experienced by free-roaming horses (who do not exhibit crib-biting), notably reduced social contact and concentrate feed such as grain [1].

- While not inherently harmful, these conditions may compromise the welfare of some animals [2].



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Crib-biting may indicate gastrointestinal problems since ulcers, colic, and recurrent colic are more prevalent in crib-biting horses [1].

- There is no clear evidence that crib-biting is the source of these issues. Crib-biting and gastrointestinal health issues may have a shared underlying cause, or crib-biting may develop to cope with gastric distress [1].
- Regardless of the reason, carers should monitor crib-biting horses for gastric problems [1].



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Crib-biting may not be a significant issue when occurring consistently in horses where crib-biting is established. However, the onset of crib-biting in previously non-stereotypic horses or an increase in the frequency of crib-biting should be cause for concern.

## Reducing or Preventing Crib-Biting

Crib-biting is best prevented or reduced by changing the horse's environment, as attempts to stop crib-biting using pharmaceutical, surgical, or physical methods are generally unsuccessful and can cause harm.

### FEED

Feed forage more often and in greater amounts, and feed less concentrates, especially sweetened concentrates [1].



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Wean foals gradually if possible, or into a mixed age group of other horses if weaning must be abrupt [3].

### WEANING

### SOCIAL CONTACT

Provide opportunities for tactile or visual contact with other horses [1].

\*There is no evidence that crib-biting can develop from proximity to crib-biting horses.



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### Sources

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3. Waters, A. J., Nicol, C. J., & French, N. P. (2010). Factors influencing the development of stereotypic and redirected behaviours in young horses: Findings of a four year prospective epidemiological study. *Equine Veterinary Journal*, 34(6), 572-579. <https://doi.org/10.2746/042516402776180241>