

## Horse Cribbing by Dr. John Fudens HMC DVM PH.

Cribbing is an obsessive compulsive habit/behavior disorder exhibited by horses which can have numerous causes but in most cases the cause is in the mental emotional arena of the animal.

What is cribbing? It is an act whereby the horse will put their teeth usually the top front on an object like the wood of their stall or fence and bit down on the wood. They then tend while chewing to suck air into their body. There is another name used for cribbing called wind sucking. This is not an accurate name as the true meaning of the term wind sucking applies to a mare who because of relaxing of the vulva and vagina when moving will actually suck air into the vagina. In cribbing the horse arches the neck and assumes a posture that is obvious by observation that they are chewing on the object. So one does not need any tests or a so called expert to tell you what the horse is doing.

Causes of cribbing. In almost every case the first cause I have seen or treated is mental/emotional. Now I will admit there could be other causes like worms, nutritional deficiencies or some systemic health issues but after 55 years of practice I have not seen those causes. Now with that out of the way lets look at the underlying reason. As horse people know or should know horses are very social herd animals. They suffer greatly by being alone. They need their own kind to interact with and establish a herd hierarchy so they know where they fit in. If they do not have their own kind to play, run and mingle with even some other animal companion will do the trick. Race horses who are usually isolated in stalls and do not have access to the environment afforded most horses can have a goat, pony or even dogs or cats around them so they do not feel isolated or alone. They need the stimulus of being with company to relieve boredom, anxiety and isolation. This is why one never sees wild horses cribbing. Of course those horses are never put in a stall or corral. They run the landscape freely.

This leads us to the second reason for this condition which ties in with the first. Too much confinement or restriction of activity. This can cause the horse to go "stir crazy." This happens with people very commonly when they are confined in a house for various reasons. Think during a storm or winter conditions or anything else where activity and connections with other people is prevent or limited. Not many people prefer and can exist very well being alone. Not being political here but with what is happening with the negative energy and turmoil that is occurring in this country among people I can understand why more of us are turning to having animals for companions rather than dealing with unkind evil humans. So back to the horses. In my career I have not seen a horse crib if given access to a pasture/field to forage, run/play and in general be allowed to behave like a horse. I do see many privately owned horses kept in very small areas of ground as single individuals. Yes I admit there can be and are exceptions to every rule of life. But those few exceptions do not negate the rules.

Treatment. Now this is why things can be a bit sticky. Conventional treatment is very limited and for the most part treats the condition/symptom as a disease without addressing the cause. There is a drug that is used to interfere with the brain receiving the pleasure impulse the horse is achieving from cribbing. The drug does not always

work and what true horse owner would want to drug their horse for the rest of its life when other alternatives exist? A collar is also made to apply to the horse's neck to prevent this act. So if you have an itch and someone puts handcuffs on your to prevent you scratching the skin does that relieve the itch??? Seriously!!

Having given up conventional vet medicine many years ago and now a Dr. of Homoeopathy I have treated numerous life forms for obsessive compulsive disorders. In humans the likes of biting and chewing nails and cuticles, picking at and causing skin lesions when there was nothing on the skin to being with and many other habits of people too numerous to mention. etc.. In the smaller domestic animals there are similar conditions of obsessive compulsive actions. I have treated a number of dogs that cause a lick granulomas on their legs usually the front as it is easier to get to. These lesions exist mostly on the top of the carpus as raw and in some cases bleeding wounds. With birds they pick their feathers off and looked like plucked chickens. With these smaller animals it is again boredom, confinement, stress/shock of some sort, lack of interaction with people or other animals that causes them to chew/lick excessively. So one can see that obsessive compulsive disorders in any life form can manifest itself in many different ways but the underlying cause is still in the mental/emotional arena.

As a homeopath I am certainly prejudice but correct in saying I know of no other form of natural therapy that can treat this condition as well as the selection of the proper homeopathic remedy given to the patient based on the proper evaluation of the patient by the homeopath as to what is needed.

So what do I do with these cases? First I eliminate any other condition(s) that could be causing this problem. I then try to understand the animal/human I am treating to the best of my ability. In my experience the daily routine of the horse needs to be observed and all environmental and/or potential health issues taken care of first before I consider the use of a homeopathic remedy. It is not always possible for a horse owner to have multiple horses, or acres for the horses to roam, forage and interact with each other. Animals especially horses can be expensive to own, keep and support. In these cases there are numerous homeopathic remedies that I have used over the years with success as long as the other causations are handled properly. Just giving homeopathy without correcting what the horse is objecting to does not work. In fact correcting why the horse, dog, bird or other life is bored can do the trick by itself. The remedies I use are all polycrests which in homeopathy are natural remedies that cover a wide variety on unhealthy issues rather than just a few conditions.

My usual go to homoeopathic remedy (assuming it still covers the patient) is Staphisagria made from the Delphinium plant. I love using this remedy for many reasons. It is primarily a remedy for the females although I have used it in males. It has a lot of mental/emotional issues, many nervous system conditions, suppressed anger, etc. It is a beautiful remedy to use in cases of rape, incest, or sexual abuses which is why it helps so many women. I will use the high potencies like !M. In the horse I give 2-3 pellets in a piece of apple repeat in about 2 hours and then we wait and watch. In humans, children or small animals I give 1 pellet at a time. Homoeopathy is energy based and 1 pellet works as well as dozens but the reason I give the large animals a couple of pellets is honestly it makes me feel better knowing that the animal with all their

digestive tract ingest will absorb the energy better. I know different homeopaths use various amounts of pellets or liquids of homeopathy they give but I work on my experience.

My next remedy is Phosphorous made from the mineral. This is a great remedy that has lots of fears, anxieties, turmoil and upsets to it. I have an African Grey parrot on this remedy at present who was shocked by a human and picked itself bald in areas of the body. The psych drugs the vet put the bird on only suppressed and damaged the vital force and symptoms further. So far the bird is responding nicely.

Another good remedy is Arsenicum album from the mineral. This is the hypochondriasis human who worries they are going to die, the world will end, they will contact every germ and die with horrible diseases, they suffer the hells of pain and will shop doctor to doctor who does not agree with their dying. All between their ears. Now fortunately we do not have animals with those types of psychosis or neuroses for the most part but unfortunately I am seeing more and more animals being driven into mental and emotional issues being around humans who themselves are nuts. I know not a very good medical term but still accurate.

Other remedies to look at are Pulsatilla, Silica, Nux Vomica, Thuja if you suspect vaccinosis from excessive vaccines are a factor. They are other remedies that can be considered. Again I must stress this condition is not easy to treat as any and all factors causing the emotional upsets have to be handled properly. Also good case taking is needed whereby the patient's totality is understood properly. Unfortunately most people owning a horse or multiples cannot easily or at all duplicate the type of environment a horse needs to truly be a horse. In this case the use of homoeopathy can help the horse when nothing else is available. Hope this helps those owners who have this problem.