



NSAID Use In Horses: Why More Is Not Always Better

What are 'NSAIDs'?

"NSAID" is an acronym for Non-Steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drug, a class of medications that inhibit the inflammatory pathway and therefore used for their anti-inflammatory and analgesic (pain suppression) effects. The use of these drugs in veterinary medicine dates back to 1875. Common applications include control of fever, reduction of swelling, and pain mitigation when a horse is lame or experiencing colic signs.

What are the different NSAIDs available to my horse?

The most common NSAIDs used in our equine patients include Banamine (Flunixin Meglumine), Bute (Phenylbutazone), and Equioxx (Firocoxib). Banamine and Bute are effective for up to 12 hours, and are often administered twice a day and then weaned to a lower dose and/or decreased frequency. Equioxx is effective for up to 24 hours and is thus given once daily. All of these medications have oral options available. Banamine is labeled for intramuscular injection as well, but it is never recommended to be given in the muscle due to potentially life-threatening side effects. Banamine may be given intravenously by someone experienced giving IV injections.

My horse is painful - can I give more?

The short answer - No! Multiple studies, including a 2011 report by Jonathan Foreman DVM, MS, DACVIM out of the University of Illinois, have concluded that using different NSAIDs at the same time - termed "stacking" - is generally no more effective than using a single NSAID. Not only is stacking ineffective, but it can cause serious adverse effects such as kidney and liver damage, gastric ulceration, diarrhea, or death. Stacking NSAIDs is also now prohibited in many equine competitions, including those sanctioned by the USEF, FEI, AQHA and most racing commissions.

For these reasons we strongly discourage administering multiple NSAIDs at once unless specifically directed by your veterinarian. If your horse's pain or inflammation is not resolving with a single prescribed NSAID, consult with your veterinarian about other safe options.



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