

## Signs Your Horse Has PPID

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PITUITARY PARS INTERMEDIA DYSFUNCTION (PPID, formerly known as equine Cushing's disease) is the most common endocrine disorder of older equids. It affects 20-30% of horses over age 15, though veterinarians have diagnosed it in horses younger than 10. The disease develops when the neurons in the hypothalamus at the base of the brain deteriorate and fail to regulate the pituitary gland's pars intermedia. As a result, the pars intermedia produces excess levels of various hormones that cause the clinical signs of PPID.

The classic sign of PPID is an **abnormal, long hair coat that fails to shed.**

However, this sign typically occurs later in the disease process.

### In addition to bloodwork, watch for earlier, more subtle signs your horse has PPID, including:

- Subtle behavior changes, such as acting dull
- Lethargy or reduced athletic performance
- Muscle wasting, especially over the topline and rump
- Delayed or lack of seasonal shedding
- Regional hypertrichosis (abnormal hair growth)
- Long guard hairs on the backs of the legs and under the jaw along the jugular grooves

Has your horse's saddle fit changed?

- A pot-bellied appearance
- Chronic infections, including skin issues and hoof abscesses
- Abnormal sweating
- Increased water intake
- Sore feet as evidence of mild or recurrent laminitis
- Increased urination
- Infertility

**NOTE:**  
This sign can also accompany insulin dysregulation and/or equine metabolic syndrome.



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### In a 2015 study of 515 horses of varying breeds and ages,

researchers found the odds of horses 15-19.9 years old having PPID were twice that of horses under 15. Horses 20-24.9 years old were 4.6 times more likely to have PPID than the horses younger than 15. Horses 25 years or older were 14 times more likely to be diagnosed with PPID. Insulin-resistant horses, no matter their age, were twice as likely to have PPID as horses with normal insulin levels. The researchers also determined that PPID prevalence was significantly greater among horses found to have five of the 11 clinical signs they studied ([TheHorse.com/113018](http://TheHorse.com/113018)).

Studies have shown that up to 76% of horses treated with pergolide have some improvement in clinical signs.

## Managing Clinical Signs

Begin your horse on a daily dose of oral pergolide (the FDA-approved medication for PPID). Ask your veterinarian to perform regular bloodwork and physical assessments to monitor your horse's response to treatment. If your PPID horse also has insulin dysregulation or equine metabolic syndrome, controlling his nonstructural carbohydrate (NSC) intake—through hay soaking and low-NSC feeds—is also key.



## Warm Weather Challenges

Help your PPID horse stay cool in warm weather by giving him a full body clip. You might have to clip him as frequently as every two to four weeks during the summer. Also offer ample access to water, particularly since these horses tend to drink more. Provide shade and ventilation, and consider stalling your horse under fans and/or misters during the hottest times of day.



## PPID is an incurable condition.

If your horse shows signs of PPID, work with your veterinarian to get him on the proper therapeutic dose of pergolide that slows disease progression and leads to an improvement in symptoms and endocrine testing.

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