



Atypical Myopathy

In the autumn months, we see a sharp increase in atypical myopathy cases. Atypical myopathy is a severe and often fatal disease of horses. The disease is thought to be caused by ingestion of a toxin found in the seeds and seedlings of the sycamore tree. Sycamore seeds contain a toxin called hypoglycin A, which is highly toxic to horses. Once ingested, the toxin interferes with the typical operation of the horse's muscles, leading to direct damage of cardiac (heart) and respiratory (breathing) muscles. The toxin also indirectly causes the kidneys to stop working.

Risk Factors for AM:

- Paddocks with Sycamore trees
- Helicopter seeds in paddock, particularly during Autumn
- Growth of seedlings - look out for in Spring
- Lack of grass on pastures



Common clinical signs of AM include:

- Mild to moderate colic-like signs
- Depression
- Low rectal temperature
- Sudden stiffness/reluctance to move
- Muscle tremors or muscular weakness
- Dark urine
- Lying down or inability to raise the head
- Collapse

Treatment

- Intravenous fluid therapy (putting on a drip)
- Pain relief
- Intensive nursing care



Prevention

If you have sycamore tree in or near your horses' paddocks, it is important to ensure your horse does not ingest the seeds or seedlings. Generally, horses will not eat the seeds/seedlings provided there is enough grass as they are not very palatable. However, the best avoidance is to ensure they are not able to at all either by removing the tree, fencing off the area in which the majority of seeds are shed, clearing the seeds once they have been shed, or not using paddocks containing or in proximity to sycamore trees in autumn/early winter and spring.