**ARTHROSCOPIC SURGERY IN HORSES**

**DIAGNOSIS**

Degenerative joint disease or osteoarthritis is the most common cause of lameness in the horse. Normal wear and tear of the cartilage, bony fragments ("chip fractures") within the joint, and OCD (Osteochondritis Dissecans) are some of the conditions that can affect equine joints and result in pain, effusion and osteoarthritis.

**TREATMENT**

While joint pain can often be managed conservatively, there are certain cases where surgical intervention becomes necessary. Arthroscopies are routinely performed in order to explore the joint, remove bone or cartilage fragments from within it, debride/repair damaged tissue and ligaments, debride bone cysts, or to eliminate infection from within the synovial cavities. Similarly, tenoscopies or bursoscopies allow for surgical examination and treatment of structures within the tendon sheaths or bursae, respectively. Arthroscopy (as well as tenoscopy and bursoscopy) of a joint involves making two small stab incisions; one to place the arthroscope (a small camera usually between 2-4 mm in diameter) and another for specialized surgical instrumentation. Exploring the joint arthroscopically allows for a more thorough examination of the joint, less trauma at the surgical site, decreased pain, reduced complications and reduced post-operative recovery time. Arthroscopies are typically performed under general anesthesia (although standing arthroscopy can be performed for a select number of conditions) and usually take between 20-45 minutes.

**PROGNOSIS**

While the prognosis is highly dependent on which joint is affected and the degree of cartilage damage, arthroscopic surgery has been shown to improve patient outcomes, increase ability to return to athletic activity and at the same time reduce post-operative complications when compared to open joint procedures.

**SAMPLE REHABILITATION SCHEDULE**

Every horse is different and every rehabilitation schedule is tailored to meet your horse’s specific needs. Below, you will find an example of a rehabilitation plan for a horse post arthroscopic surgery:

- **Simple Arthroscopy:**
  - Two weeks strict stall rest
  - Four to six weeks of stall rest with walking in-hand
  - Four weeks of small paddock turnout with gradual increase of walking exercise under saddle
  - Four weeks of large paddock turnout and gradual return to controlled exercise
  - Recheck exam at eight to 12 weeks post-operation

**CONTACT**

For more information, please contact the Equine Sports Medicine and Surgery Service at hlasportsmedicine@tufts.edu.