

**Sweet Itch**  
**ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE**  
**Information Sheet WS050/09**  
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**SWEET ITCH IN THE HORSE OR PONY**

**What is it?**

This familiar term has evolved to be used in the context of horses that itch and rub as a result of midge bite sensitivity. The problem usually affects ponies and the distribution of lesions is usually the crest of the mane, the withers and the rump and tail head.

Affected ponies can be quite frantic to rub themselves on almost anything and to bite themselves where they can reach. Lesions are usually moist, red, swollen and hairless. The mane and tail can become almost bald, in extreme cases.

More general allergic skin disease, arising from other triggers than midge bites, are not strictly within the term 'sweet itch'.

**Treatment**

In conventional terms, antihistamine and corticosteroid drugs are indicated. These can suppress the allergic response but do nothing for the underlying sensitivity. Desensitising treatments have been used, with variable success.

In alternative medicine, we would treat constitutionally, using [homeopathy](#), with expectation of success in about 80% of cases. In successful cases, the susceptibility is reduced, thereby reducing the symptoms and signs, so real progress has been made. We can also offer desensitising techniques, using homeopathic medicines.

Topical treatments are also available but do not address the underlying issue.

## **Management**

We would advise changing over to a [natural and horse-suitable diet](#), to improve the health of the immune system and overall health. We would advise against [vaccination](#), as this is a disease of immune origin and vaccines should only be given to healthy horses, according to the product data sheet.

Using a midge cover (proprietary brands available) will help to manage the itchy horse or pony, while treatments are being tried. Using midge deterrent substances in the horse's or pony's coat is also worthwhile but we would recommend natural preparations rather than strong manufactured chemicals.

Stabling at midge flying time (around dawn and dusk) is also a sensible and practical option, where possible.

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