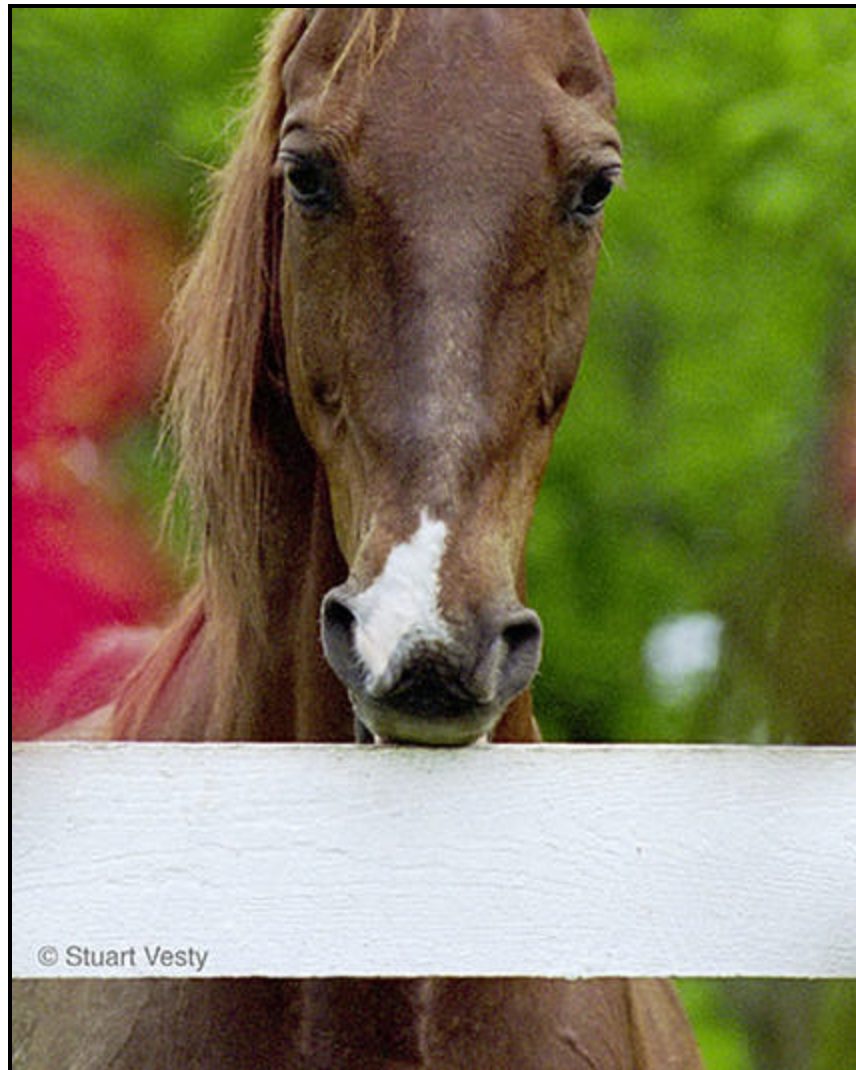

C. Jarvis Insurance Agency INC.

Volume 4, No 3 MARCH 2005

News

Providing Equine, Liability, Farm and Ranch Insurance since 1946



© Stuart Vesty

Photograph by [Stuart Vesty](#).

That Awful Habit: Cribbing

What is cribbing?

Perhaps the most well known stable vice, cribbing, not only damages the horses surroundings, but may also threaten his life in extreme cases. Cribbing is basically when a horse swallows air. Some horses do this by grasping a fixed object, such as a fence board, with their upper teeth, then arching their necks and pulling, usually while making a strange, grunting sound. Other horses crib by resting their incisor teeth on an object without grasping it, still others rest their chin on an object and swallow air. Other horses, however, do not use an object at all, but move their lips, close

their mouths, flex and arch their necks, and swallow air and grunt without grasping. Cribbing is often confused with wood chewing, another stable vice. Wood chewing however, is when a horse actually bites and chews wood, destroying fences and barns. Cribbing may also be referred to as wind sucking, or swallowing.

Cribbing may lead to other more serious health problems, such as poor digestion, colic, and varied dental problems.

What causes a horse to crib?

It is not known for certain what causes a horse to crib.

It is thought that stress may be a contributor. When a horse cribs, it is believed that his body releases endorphins, which stimulate the pleasure center of his brain. This may be the explanation why many horses crib when under stress, as well as why it is such an addictive habit, and such a hard one to break.

Every horse handles stress differently, some better than others. It appears that susceptibility to stress in horses is inherited, so genetics may also be a factor.

Improper diet and feeding is also thought to contribute to cribbing, again because it may cause a horse more stress.

Another popular theory is that cribbing is due to boredom, and lack of exercise. Horses kept stalled are more likely to become cribbers than horses that are allowed to roam in a pasture.

Cribbing has never been reported in wild or semi-wild horses. Horses in the wild or in the pasture naturally spend 90 percent of their time grazing, and using their upper teeth. A horse's inherent need to graze, and thus use his upper teeth, may also cause a horse to crib. Horses that are kept stalled spend less than 30 percent of their time eating. Inability to graze, is thought to cause stress and may also contribute to cribbing.

Another popular opinion is supported by the fact that allowing horses more time at pasture can reduce cribbing. Most stall cribbers do not crib while in the field.

It is also a common belief that cribbing may be learned from other horses; for this reason, many horse owners offer separate cribs for their horses.

What is the best therapy to cure a cribber?

Once a horse starts cribbing it is difficult to get them to stop. The best thing is to try to prevent it from occurring in the first place.

There appears to be an inherited susceptibility to stress in horses, so genetics are part of the answer. Improper diet and feeding practices are commonly cited as factors that may also lead to cribbing.

Here are a few suggestions to help prevent and reduce cribbing:

- Provide companionship
- Allow time to graze and roam
- Train and handle consistently and intelligently
- Feed less grain concentrate (consider using higher-fat rations)
- Feed more roughages (consider using forage supplements)

Provide your horse with a companion, preferably another horse, but goats also often make good companions for horses.

You may also check to see if this horse has free access to a mineral block 24 hours a day. There are cases of horses who started chewing wood after their mineral block was used up – and quit the day the block was replaced.

Try to allow your horse access to fresh grass, or grass hay at all times.

A cribbing strap, or collar may also be useful. This strap is placed around the horse's neck. at the poll. A metal plate at the bottom of the strap causes pressure to the throat when the horse arches its neck to crib. This makes it difficult, uncomfortable for the horse to swallow air. These straps can be obtained through many tack suppliers.

Another option, usually used as a last resort, is a surgical treatment which includes cutting the muscles which flex the neck. If this is not successful, a more drastic surgery may be done to cut the muscles which allow the horse to pull neck up and back.

Did you know. . .

The World's Largest Horse was a Shire gelding named Samson, bred by Thomas Cleaver of Toddington Mills, England. Foaled in 1846, this horse measured 21.2 1/2 hand high in 1850, and weighed 3,360 pounds.

Please visit us . . .

Stop by at <http://www.jarvisinsurance.com> this month and see our newest BREED FEATURE featuring the magnificent, THE PERCHERON HORSE. This special feature contains interesting information regarding the history and origin of the breed as well as several beautiful photographs by equine photographer, Stuart Vesty. We hope you'll enjoy this tribute.

Newsletter written by W. Anthony Pontrello
produced by

www.tonyontheweb.com

C. Jarvis Insurance Agency, 33755 Station Street, Solon, Ohio 44139 USA
tel: 440.248.5330 fax: 440.248.8737 info@jarvisinsurance.com
or visit us at: www.jarvisinsurance.com