

## CASE REPORT: PAIN – A CAUSE OF EQUINE BEHAVIOUR ABERRATIONS (1)

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### Introduction

Behaviour problems in horses are often thought to be due to the horse's bad attitude however, when these cases are carefully worked up there is often an underlying physical problem and pain may play an important role.

### Case history

A five year old Dutch Warmblood mare presented for rearing and flipping over backwards. The mare had been repeatedly examined by an equine veterinarian and a (non-veterinarian) equine dentist who had found no abnormalities. Several different bits were tried and side reins were used to keep her head down. The mare was whipped every time she reared. None of these measures helped.

### Physical examination

Routine physical examination: no abnormalities were detected.

Lungeing: as soon as a small amount of tension was put on the lunge rein the mare shook her head horizontally for approximately 1-2 seconds, reared and flipped over onto her back.

### Further diagnostics

Neurological examination: the mare was slow to resume a normal stance when her hind legs were placed in an abnormal position.

Dental examination and endoscopy of the upper airways proved unremarkable.

Radiography of the atlanto-occipital joint area: revealed fractures of the first and second cervical vertebrae and evidence of cervical instability.

### Treatment and prognosis

The mare was deemed unfit for dressage and was kept for breeding.

### Conclusion

Horses are frequently punished for "bad behaviour". These behaviours are frequently due to underlying physical problems and not a "nasty" horse. This case highlights the importance of careful history taking and a thorough veterinary examination with the use of further diagnostics (if necessary) when dealing with equine behaviour problems.