

What you should know before using Bute and Banamine

Bute(phenylbutazone) and Banamine(flunixin meglumine) are the most common non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs(NSAIDs) used by equine veterinarians and horse owners. They are in the same category as aspirin and ibuprofen and are very effective against fever, swelling and inflammation from injuries and infections, laminitis (founder), and musculoskeletal pain. Banamine is very effective against visceral pain and is the medication of choice for colic. Bute and Banamine do not come without side effects however, and could do more harm than good if administered improperly. The two organ systems most commonly affected are the kidney and gastrointestinal systems.

Proper dosing is important to effective use of bute and Banamine while minimizing side effects. Banamine should be given at .5 mg per pound of body weight in both the intravenous and paste form. That is equal to 10 mls of the injectable for a 1,000 pound horse. The paste form is dosed by weight on the tube. Banamine takes effect within 2 hours and the peak response is 12 hours after it is given. The total duration of effect is 24 to 36 hours. Banamine can be given safely at the recommended dose every 12 hours in a healthy, hydrated horse for several days. The importance of following the dose and frequency of administration recommendations is that research has determined the amount that will give the maximal result with the minimal side effects. Careless or uninformed administration of Banamine can have deleterious results.

Bute comes in an injectable, paste, and tablet form. The tablets for a full grown horse are normally 1 gram each. The injectable form is to go in the vein only and should be given by a veterinarian. Administration outside the vein can cause serious damage to the tissues. The recommended dose for bute is 1 to 2 grams a day. The dose can be split and given every 12 hours. Higher doses can be given for short periods of time as prescribed by a veterinarian. Low doses of bute can be given safely in many horses for weeks and months at a time. The lowest effective dose should always be used. Occasionally a horse will suffer side effects to even lower doses. These usually involve the gastrointestinal system. If your horse shows signs of colic, diarrhea, lack of appetite, or depression while on bute, contact your veterinarian. Bute is thought to have the highest risk for gastrointestinal side effects but any NSAID can cause a problem. Bute is very effective for musculoskeletal problems but should not be used for colic as it is less effective than Banamine and can limit the types of medication your veterinarian can use for treatment.

Sick horses are often dehydrated, and giving bute or Banamine to a dehydrated horse can cause permanent kidney damage. It is a good idea to contact your veterinarian before administering one of these medications. Your horse may need intravenous fluids to rehydrate prior to safe administration of an NSAID. Take the horse's temperature before giving bute or Banamine. They are effective fever reducers and can lower your horse's temperature. Your veterinarian may want to know if the horse has a fever before you give the medication.

Pain is an important protective mechanism of the body. A horse with an injured, painful leg will not want to bear full weight on the leg and will be less likely to further injure it. Bute and Banamine relieve pain and inflammation and at times may cover the pain when more aggressive therapy is needed. Banamine and bute are convenient to have on hand but you should always consult your veterinarian before medicating your horse at home.

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