

A Little Red in the Face, a Laceration Case
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Last fall we took an emergency call for a 15 year old quarter horse mare with a laceration on her face. Upon arrival at the farm she had a large triangular laceration on the right side of her face. It was a large flap of skin with muscle and other soft tissue hanging down leaving the mandible (jaw bone) and several major blood vessels and nerves exposed. She also had a long superficial laceration (only skin deep) on the left side of her face. A physical exam showed the mare was in shock which was not surprising as several large areas of blood loss were seen in her paddock. Although she was not actively bleeding on arrival, when she would lower her head she would begin dramatically bleeding from major blood vessels in the throatlatch area. A pressure bandage was placed over the wound and she was transported to the Nebraska Equine Veterinary Clinic for more intensive treatment.

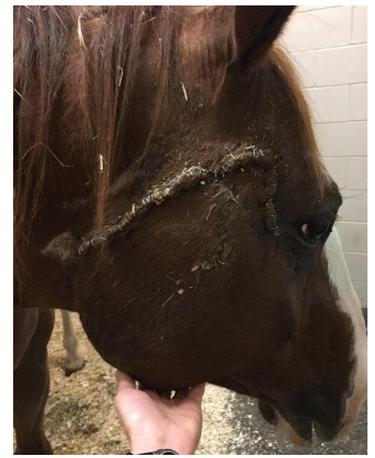


Initial exam at the farm



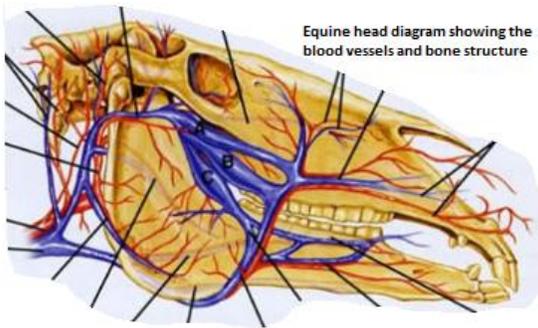
Wound after cleaning at the clinic

At the clinic, the bandage was removed and the mare was prepared for the wound to be repaired. To complicate the repair, the wound started bleeding rapidly again. The blood vessels were then tied off to stop the bleeding and she was treated with IV fluids for shock. The flap was closed with a combination of sutures and staples. The tan rubber material sticking out of the wound is a drain, which allows for any fluid build-up within the wound to drain out instead of building up underneath the suture line, and causing the wound to dehiscence (or break open). The drain was removed when drainage was no longer noted, approximately three days after the repair.

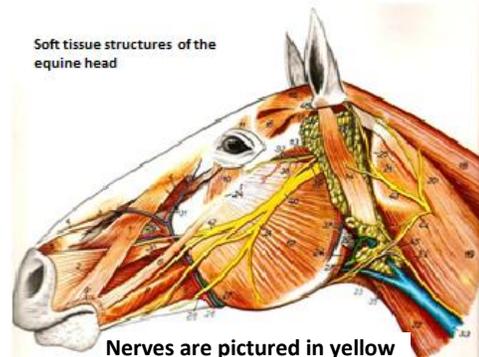


Left: Close up of wound immediately after repair with penrose drain. **Middle:** Shows wound repaired and lack of muscle tone in lips from facial nerve paralysis (droopy lips). **Right:** 3 days post-repair after removing the penrose drain.

The mare was hospitalized for several days for treatment and monitoring. The alignment of her teeth was skewed due to the damage to the skull affecting the temporomandibular joint (“TMJ” or jaw joint), and the muscles of the jaw. Along with that, she had facial nerve paralysis on both sides of her face causing her lips to be paralyzed. A horse’s lips are very important for grabbing food as well as drinking water. There was a major concern the first few days as to whether she would be able to eat, as she was struggling to move her jaw and could not eat hay. Although her appetite was great, the senior mash she was offered ended up mostly on the ground. After several days of treatment with anti-inflammatories and antibiotics some of the swelling went down and she was able successfully eat her senior feed and had started eating hay. At that point she was released to go home.



Equine head diagram showing the blood vessels and bone structure



Soft tissue structures of the equine head

Nerves are pictured in yellow

The sutures and staples were removed after three weeks. At last re-check she was healthy, happy and had regained nerve function of the left side of her lips. The facial nerve paralysis to the right side of her face may be permanent and she will likely always need special consideration to her new dental abnormalities, but she is currently doing well on senior feed and hay. All-in-all it was a great outcome for this mare. A special thanks to the mares owner for allowing us to share her case.



3 weeks post injury after suture removal

