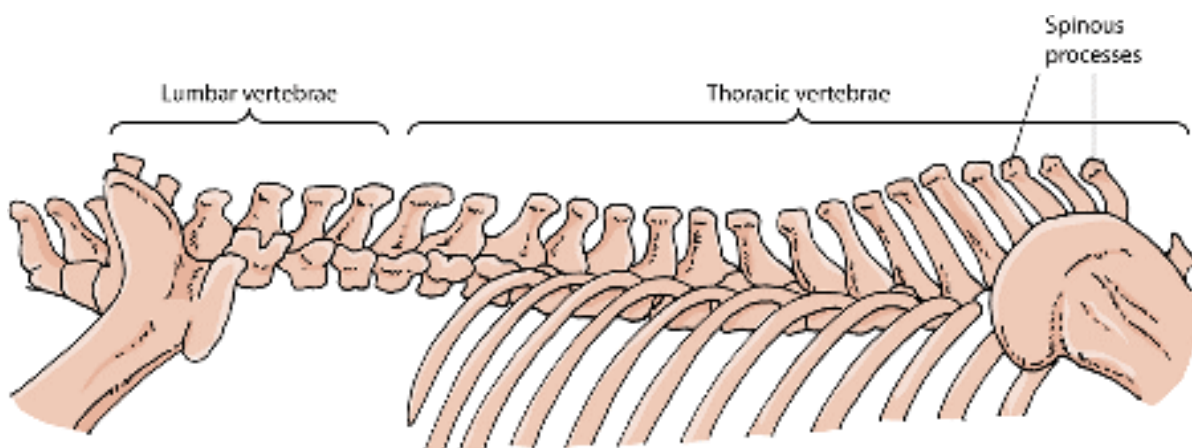


# KISSING SPINE



## WHAT IS "KISSING SPINE"?

**Overriding Dorsal Spinous Processes** (ORDSP) or "Kissing Spines", as it is more commonly known, is the **narrowing** of space between **adjacent dorsal spinous processes** of the **thoracic** and **lumbar** vertebrae. The dorsal spinous process is the vertical part of the vertebrae that projects upwards and should be evenly spaced. This condition is reported to be more common in jumping and dressage horses with a breed preference for Thoroughbreds as a largely overrepresented population in many studies. This back pathology is most commonly located behind the withers where the **rider sits** and also behind the saddle.

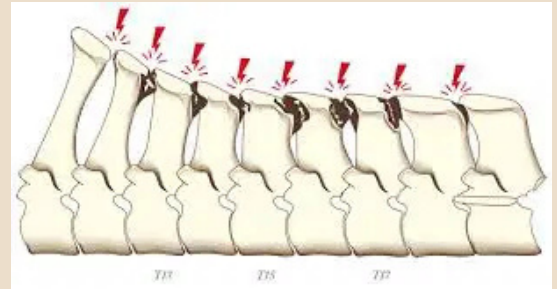


# KISSING SPINE

## CLINICAL SIGNS

The clinical signs of a horse that may have Kissing Spine includes:

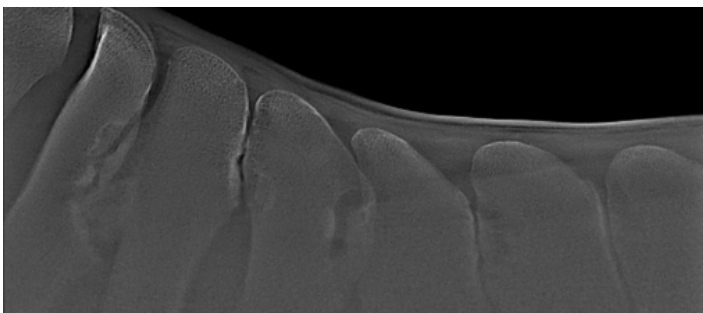
- Avoidance behaviours
- Refusing to accept bit contact
- Refusing to jump
- 'Hollow' or not rounded through the back
- Unwilling to bend to one direction
- Not consistently picking up the correct lead
- Behavioural issues on the ground or tacking up



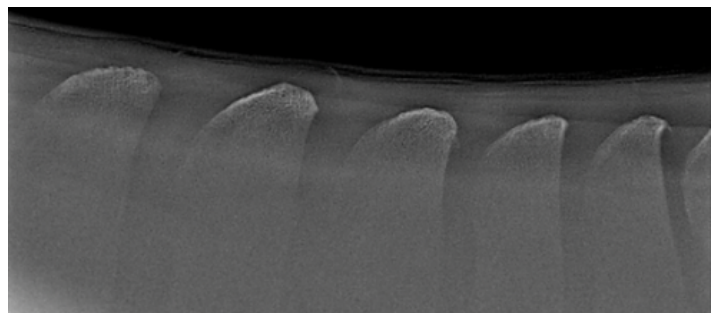
There is a **wide variety** in the clinical presentation of horses with ORDSP. It is important to note that the severity of the clinical signs does not necessarily correspond to the severity of pathology. Some horses can still perform and remain in regular work with ORDSP.

## DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis of ORDSP is based on performing lateral **radiographs** of thoracic and lumbar regions to directly assess the relationship between the dorsal spinous processes. **Ultrasound** can also be used to assess the bone surfaces, surrounding soft tissue and ligaments, as back soreness is often associated with inflammation of these structures. Due to the nature of ORDSP, radiographic and ultrasonographic findings alone are not enough to **definitively** establish this as a cause for behavioural issues. Your veterinarian needs to assess the history, clinical findings and diagnostic imaging when making a conclusion. **Nuclear scintigraphy** (bone scan) enables assessment of active inflammation surrounding the ORDSPs through measurement of active bone remodelling or increased blood flow and is more definitive. It is important to assess the presence of inflammation, as many ORDSP lesions identified by radiographs may be dormant and cause no clinical issues.



**Radiographic Evidence of  
Kissing Spine**



**No Evidence of Kissing Spine**

# KISSING SPINE

## TREATMENT

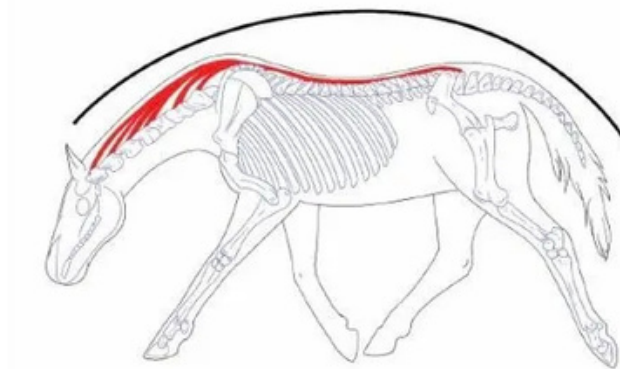
Exercise, stretching and building core strength are essential in the treatment of ORDSP, however, your veterinarian may also recommend the use of the following:

- Laser therapy (Class IV)
- Acupuncture
- Bisphosphonates (eg. Tildren)
- Shockwave therapy
- Mesotherapy
- Corticosteroid injections
- Surgery

**Exercises** typically involve a slow introduction to work encouraging a long and low frame within all gaits with the addition of pole and cavaletti work. This encourages the horse to **flex round** and open up through the back and **increasing space between the dorsal spinous processes**. A daily stretching routine involving **carrot exercises** is also important to improve stretch over the top-line, increase flexibility and improve core strength.

It is a slow and steady process returning to full work and previous levels of athletic performance may not always be possible particularly if involving **jumping disciplines**. In our practice, we have seen good results with perseverance and dedication to following a strict rehabilitation program in conjunction with other treatment modalities.

**Therefore, we consider the diagnosis of ORDSPs is not always retirement worthy.**



We strongly recommend speaking to your regular veterinarian if you suspect your horse has ORDSP as diagnosis is the first step to improving your horse's comfort, performance and ultimately quality of life.

**If you have any questions or concerns please contact us on  
0412 619 740.**