

Key Concepts:

- NEVER PRACTICE THIS RESTRAINT TECHNIQUE ON OVC TEACHING HORSES!
- This form of restraint is the harshest form of horse restraint, and is very effective. However, it is painful and is associated with trauma to the gums.

Background Information:

Application of a chain across the upper gums of the horse's mouth is a common form of restraint in certain horse industry sectors; in particular, a lip chain is quite commonly utilized for restraint on Thoroughbred racehorses. This form of restraint causes immobilization of the horse through inducing discomfort. Unlike the upper lip twitch ("nose twitch), the lip chain is not associated with a known endorphin release.

This technique is being introduced in Clinical Medicine I so that you are aware of it and will be knowledgeable about it should you work in the racing industry in future years.

However, this technique of restraint is NOT PERMITTED when working with our OVC Teaching Horses. As well, it should not be performed on any client-owned horse in the Veterinary Teaching Hospital without first obtaining consent from the senior clinician on the case.

As well, it is advisable to always seek permission from the owner before using a lip chain on their horse.

Application of a Lip Chain: (video script)

To apply a lip chain, you must first unwrap the chain of the lead shank from around the noseband of the halter and then refasten it. Slide the chain down from the nose until it is positioned in front of the mouth.

Use one hand to grasp the upper lip and raise it to show the upper gums of the mouth. While holding the lip up, use the other hand to gently but firmly lay the chain across the upper gums, at the junction between the gums and the upper lip. Lay the chain across the gums starting on the right side of the mouth.

Troubleshooting: Keep the chain tight as you lay it across the gums; that way, you do not need to tighten the chain afterwards – tightening the chain causes the chain to slide across the gums and increases both pain and trauma to the gums.

Bad form: Loosely sliding the chain up under the upper lip and then tightening it by pulling on the lead shank is very traumatic to the gums, and very painful for the horse! Do not do this.

Adjust your grip on the lead shank to keep the chain tight against the gums. You will need to hold the chain this time, instead of the rope, in order to maintain correct placement of the lip chain.

To remove the lip chain at the end of the procedure, raise the lip with one hand and gently loosen the chain from across the gums. Slide the chain back over the horse's nose. When safe to do so, rewrap the chain around the noseband and refasten the clasp on the right side of the halter again (not shown in this video).

Troubleshooting: Bruising or ulceration may be seen on the upper gums for a day or two following application of a lip chain. Consider "lip chain" as a differential diagnosis for such lesions ahead of other potential causes (such as clotting disorders or kidney failure) when the lesions are only seen on the upper gums and nowhere else on the horse!