Now that we understand the basic pharmacology of the medications commonly used in treating equine gastric ulcer syndrome (EGUS), let’s now look into the various herbal preparations available and why they are effective in treating ulcers. Herbal preparations have long been used to prevent, soothe, and repair gastric ulcers in the stomach, particularly amongst groups that commonly practice Chinese medicine. In veterinary medicine, many professionals and horse owners are turning to herbal preparations to treat ulcer cases where the horse does not respond or responds adversely to more commonly used medications, such as omeprazole or ranitidine, or when trying to prevent future cases of ulcers in ulcer-prone horses, such as those frequently competing, traveling, or in heavy work and living in less ideal situations for gut health.

The most proven herbal treatment for ulcers is ginger, a mildly spicy root. Ginger is a strong gastroprotectant that works by reducing the numbers of inflammatory cytokines, small proteins that signal to the immune system to begin an inflammatory response, in the stomach (Wang et al., 2011). This helps reduce the overreaction of the immune system to environmental assaults on the stomach, such as medications (e.g. flunixin or phenylbutazone) or diet. As a treatment for ulcers, when properly administered, ginger has shown to be as effective or better as cimetidine for treating ulcers (Kumar and Pal, 2011). Ginger does help repair existing damage to the stomach lining as well, but it has no direct effect on controlling inflammation or reducing acidity in the stomach.

Chamomile, which is a small white flower, has also been shown to have anti-ulcer properties in multiple published studies. Chamomile is a gastroprotectant, meaning it protects the lining of the stomach. This attribute comes from its strong antioxidant properties, which means it denatures many of the corrosive substances found in the stomach. This helps protect the lining of the stomach which would otherwise be damaged by the caustic fluids commonly found in the stomach. (Cemek et al., 2010). Another study examined the cellular structures of gastric membrane samples assaulted with various corrosive materials. It was found that those treated with chamomile extract actually showed complete repair of the ulcers, even on the cellular level (Al-Hashem 2010).

The final herbal treatment we will examine is quercetin, which is actually a molecule responsible for plant pigment in radish leaves, fennel leaves, and kale. Unlike ginger or chamomile, quercetin does not contribute to the repair of ulcers. Instead, quercetin helps prevent ulcers by increasing the production of protective gastric mucus in the stomach and down regulating the production of inflammatory cytokines (Yan et al., 2012; Wang 2011). The production decrease of cytokines, or signaling proteins, is a trait shared with ginger, as previously mentioned. Quercetin has also been determined to be a urease inhibitor (Xiao et al., 2012). Urease is an enzyme produced by microbes commonly found in the stomach known to be closely associated with ulcers and is theorized to dramatically increase the acidity of the stomach environment. By inhibiting the effects of urease, the decreased acidity of the stomach would help maintain a healthy, ulcer-free stomach lining.

All three of these herbs — ginger, chamomile, and quercetin — are found in significant amounts within Cavalor® Gastro Aid powder and Cavalor® Gastro 8 Pro paste along with several other herbal components known to help prevent and treat ulcers. For daily prevention, one would use Cavalor® Gastro Aid powder over their horse’s daily ration. When under more stressful conditions, such as during a competition or trailer loading, use a tube of Cavalor® Gastro 8 paste before loading.