

NEWSLETTER

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COLIC

The term 'colic' simply means abdominal pain. There are many causes of colic in the horse and symptoms range from very mild discomfort to violent thrashing.

- What is colic? - A horse with colic will show varying symptoms depending on the cause of the colic, how long it has been present and the stoicism of the patient. Mild colic symptoms include dullness, curling up of the top lip, adopting a 'straining to urinate' stance and/or lying quietly. Severe colic pain can cause a horse to roll and throw itself about in an uncontrolled and dangerous manner.
- What causes colic? - Colic can be due to something as simple as a gut 'spasm' resulting from a change in diet or routine (i.e. a digestive upset) or as serious as twisting of a part of the intestine with consequent strangulation (cutting off) of its blood supply. The more common causes include intestinal spasm, impaction (where the intestine becomes clogged with semi-digested food material), displacement of a segment of bowel from its normal position, torsion or twisting, strangulation through hernias or holes, strangulation by fatty tumours wrapping around the intestine, obstruction to the blood supply from old worm damage and other causes of partial or complete obstruction to movement of ingested material through the gut.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR HORSE HAS COLIC

Call your veterinary surgeon immediately and explain the symptoms. Persistent severe pain usually indicates a serious problem and an emergency situation. If possible, keep the horse walking but do not attempt to take the horse out of its stable if it is in uncontrollable pain. Remember that the key to success with colic is early diagnosis and treatment. It is better that the horse has recovered when the veterinary surgeon arrives rather than at 'death's door' after waiting too long before seeking help. Similarly, if your veterinary surgeon recommends referral to a specialist equine hospital or clinic, it is preferable that the horse travels without delay and is better when it arrives sooner rather than later, arriving too late to be saved.

HOW IS COLIC TREATED?

Different types of colic require different treatments, so an accurate diagnosis is the first step and your veterinary surgeon will help with this or will recommend referral to an equine hospital or clinic that has specialist expertise with equine colic diagnosis and treatment. Simple large colon impactions usually respond to treatment by lubrication with oil, salt and water given by stomach tube. Many cases, particularly spasmodic colics, respond quickly to analgesic medication (pain killers) such as butylscopolamine (a spasmolytic) and phenylbutazone ('bute' an anti-inflammatory pain killer). Some cases require urgent aggressive treatment - either medical or surgical, if the horse's life is to be saved.

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