

EQUINE COLIC

CAUSES AND TREATMENT

Colic is a general term indicating abdominal pain. It is the number one killer of horses affecting 1 of every 10 horses each year. It is not a disease, but a combination of signs that alert us to abdominal pain in the horse.

Signs of colic: will vary according to the severity and advancement of the condition. Abdominal pain comes on suddenly and other symptoms usually do not occur all at the same time. They usually come on and intensify if not treated quickly.

- ❖ Pawing the ground
- ❖ Restlessness and pacing
- ❖ Sweating
- ❖ Looking at or kicking at belly
- ❖ Lack of appetite
- ❖ Lying down

More severe signs may include:

- ❖ Bloating and firm belly
- ❖ Muscle tremors or straining
- ❖ Male horses may stretch out and relax their penis, without urinating
- ❖ Kick violently
- ❖ Sweat profusely
- ❖ Lie down and get up frequently
- ❖ Roll
- ❖ Sit on haunches like a dog
- ❖ Have an abnormal temperature
- ❖ Have an increased respiration rate
- ❖ Have an elevated heart rate
- ❖ Have few or no gut sounds

Horses with severe signs of colic should be seen by a veterinarian immediately. If treatment is not started quickly, death often occurs within 12 – 24 hours if not only from the colic itself, but from such severe pain that leads to shock and therefore leads to death.

The veterinarian will perform a rectal exam to determine a possible cause of the colic. It may be due to an impaction, obstruction, twist in the intestines or simply overactivity of the intestines.

Causes of colic:

- ❖ Overeating
- ❖ Cribbing or “sucking air”
- ❖ Sudden change in diet
- ❖ Consumption of moldy feed
- ❖ Turnout on the wet pastures in early spring
- ❖ Heavy meal before work
- ❖ Feeding or watering before proper cooling after work
- ❖ Parasite infestation
- ❖ Foreign bodies
- ❖ Water deprivation or warm stagnant water

You can keep incidence of colic to a minimum by following these management practices:

- + Supply plenty of fresh, clean drinking water, (except when the horse has become excessively hot. Then it should be given small sips of lukewarm water or none until properly cooled down.)**
- + Talk to your veterinarian about a regular parasite control program**
- + Use processed grains in small amounts**
- + Avoid pain-relief medications unless prescribed by your vet. Most of these analgesics can cause ulcers.**
- + Avoid sudden changes in diet**
- + Reduce stress. Sudden changes in workload or environment can be harmful to intestinal function**
- + Feed at regular times and intervals**
- + Feed good quality forages free of mold, weeds and foreign objects**
- + Check environment that the horse is kept for toxic substances, noxious weeds blister beetles and other foreign matter**
- + Offer dry hay while grazing in high moisture pastures**
- + Check teeth often for the need for floating**
- + Know your horses attitude**



