

Preventing Colic, Part One

Understanding and Controlling Colic

Owners beware. The number one killer of horses is colic. **Colic is not a disease, but rather a combination of signs** that alert us to abdominal pain in the horse. Colic can range from mild to severe, but it should never be ignored. Many of the conditions that cause colic can become life threatening in a relatively short period of time. Only by quickly and accurately recognizing colic – and seeking qualified veterinary help – can the chance for recovery be maximized.



Recognizing Colic

A major problem for you as a horse owner is identifying the signs of colic. That's because signs can vary greatly between individuals and may also depend on the **severity** of the pain. However, among the more common signs are:

- Turning the head toward the flank
- Pawing
- Kicking or biting the abdomen
- Stretching out as if to urinate without doing so
- Repeatedly lying down and getting up or attempting to do so
- Rolling, especially violent rolling
- Sitting in a dog-like position, or lying on the back
- Lack of appetite (anorexia)
- Putting head down to water without drinking
- Lack of bowel movements, as evidenced by the small number of manure piles
- Absence of, or reduced, digestive sounds
- Sweating
- Rapid respiration and/or flared nostrils
- Elevated pulse rate (greater than 52 beats per minute)
- Depression
- Lip curling (Flehmen response)
- Cool extremities

First....

Time is perhaps the most critical factor if colic is to be successfully treated. While a number of cases resolve without medical intervention, a significant percentage do require prompt medical care, including emergency surgery. If you suspect your horse is suffering from colic, the following action plan is suggested:

1. Remove all food and water.
2. Notify your veterinarian immediately.
3. Be prepared to provide the following specific information:

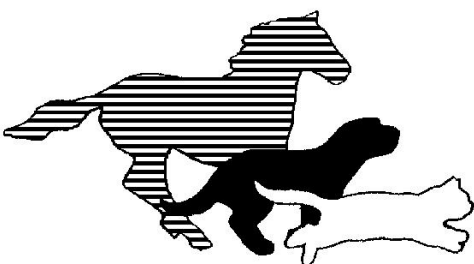
- ✓ Pulse rate
- ✓ Respiratory rate (breathing)
- ✓ Rectal temperature
- ✓ Color of mucous membranes
- ✓ Capillary refill time (tested by pressing on gums adjacent to teeth, releasing, then counting the seconds it takes for color to return)
- ✓ Behavioral signs, such as pawing, kicking, rolling, depression, etc.
- ✓ Digestive noises, or lack of them

- ✓ Bowel movements, including color, consistency and frequency
- ✓ Any recent changes in management, feeding or exercise
- ✓ Medical history, including deworming and any past episodes of abdominal pain
- ✓ Breeding history and pregnancy status if the patient is a mare, and recent breeding history if the patient is a stallion
- ✓ Insurance status and value of the horse (NOTE: The insurance carrier should be notified if surgery or euthanasia is being considered)

Then....

1. Keep horse as calm and comfortable as possible.
2. Allow the animal to lie down if it appears to be resting and is not at risk of injury.
3. If the horse is rolling or behaving violently, attempt to walk the horse slowly.
4. Do not administer drugs unless specifically directed to do so by your equine practitioner. Drugs may camouflage problems and interfere with accurate diagnosis.
5. Follow your veterinarian's advice exactly and await his or her arrival.

Information provided by American Association of Equine Practitioners



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