

GUIDED NOTES: Colic

What is colic? ___abdominal pain_____

Multitude of different ___symptoms_____

Can be one of the most frightening conditions

On average 4-10% of horses are diagnosed with colic annually

It is important to realize however, that the vast majority of colics never have their exact causation determined. Happily, this “unidentified type” of colic, also has a recovery rate of over 95%. This can be interpreted as; most horses get a mild form of colic, which is successfully treated by their veterinarian, making further investigation unnecessary.

Gas Colic

- Excessive build of gas within the intestines
- Lots of ___flatulence_____

Spasmodic Colic

- Result of intestinal cramps or spasms
- ___Intestinal_____ hyper motility

Impaction

- One of the most common attended by veterinarians
- Occurs where partially digested feed, typically roughage, builds up in the large intestine of the horse and stops moving, resulting in a blockage or impaction
- Poop is not passing

Sand Colic

- Fine particle sand builds up in the large intestines resulting in colic
- Can be from horses living in sandy areas or being fed from ground

Twisted Gut

- Intestinal torsion
 - Portion of the intestine twists on itself
- Intussusception
 - Portion of intestine inverts into itself
 - Less common, but extremely serious and life threatening

Displacement/Entrapment Colic

- Occurs when an area of the intestine moves from its normal location in the abdominal cavity to somewhere else
- Entrapment - the displacements cannot freely move back to its original location

- Displacements and entrapments are very serious because this change in location stretches the blood supply to the area of intestine and can result it being compressed or squashed.

Strangulation Colic

- Occurs when the blood supply to an area of intestines is cut off (strangulated)
- Cutting off the blood supply, results in rapid death of the intestinal wall, a serious life threatening situation

Symptoms of Colic

- Pawing the ground
- Looking at the flank
- Kicking or biting at the flank
- Tail swishing
- Repeatedly laying down and getting up again
- Lying on their back
- Violently throwing themselves to the ground
- Rolling
- Curling upper lip
- Stretched stance with hind legs behind them
- Sweating
- Elevated breathing rate
- Inappetence
- Extreme dullness
- Extreme agitation
- Bloodshot eyes/lips

Symptoms

- Horses with colic will exhibit only some of these signs
- Which signs they exhibit give little indication of which type of colic they have

Regardless, contact a vet ASAP!

In most cases,

Earlier treatment results in better outcomes!

While waiting for the vet

- Have a designated area to treat and observe horse
- Remove feed
- Take horse for a walk

- Offer water

Observe horse for:

- Worsening of symptoms
- Interest in food or water
- Poop (Defection)
- Farts (Flatulence)

Vet Arrives

- mucus membrane color, hydration status, heart rate, respiratory rate and gut sounds
- may also perform a rectal examination, naso-gastric intubation, abdominal ultrasound, a belly tap or blood sampling
- more accurate picture of the type of colic affecting your horse, so an appropriate treatment plan can be implemented
- Variety of treatment plans depending on the type and severity

Treatment

Pain Relief

- Horses with colic are in pain, common equine pain relieving medications such as phenylbutazone are used in the treatment of colic.

Antispasmodics

- Some horses with colic have over-active spasming intestines. Medicines which reduce intestinal motility can be used in such cases.

Electrolytes/ Fluids

- Horses that are dehydrated can have electrolytes and fluids administered via a stomach tube or intravenous dip.

Laxatives

- Laxatives such as liquid paraffin are given using a stomach tube and particularly employed for cases of impaction.

Surgery

- Although dreaded by owners, surgical treatment for cases of twisted gut, strangulation and displacement/entrapment is the only option. It is estimated that there are 2-3 colic surgeries per hour in the USA. Unfortunately, not only are these expensive, the statistics indicate, only 50% of horses operated on for colic survive.

Effects of Colic

- Worm control - heavy worm burdens increase the risk of colic.
- Diet change - rapid dietary change increases the risk of colic.
- Dental health - poor dentition is associated with impaction colic.

- Roughage quality - Diets predominately containing coarse roughage (such as straw) are associated with impaction colic.
- Concentrate feeding - feeding over 5kg of concentrates, in one or two feeds increases the risk of colic. Feed little and often to reduce this risk.
- Pasture access - horses with greatest time at pasture have least incidence of colic.
- **Exercise** - reduced exercise increases the incidence of colic.
- **Cribbing** - horses that crib have an increased incidence of colic.
- Transport - post travelling horses have a greater incidence of colic
- Post Pregnancy - mares have a greater incidence of colic in the 2 - 6 months after having a foal.