

# Colic

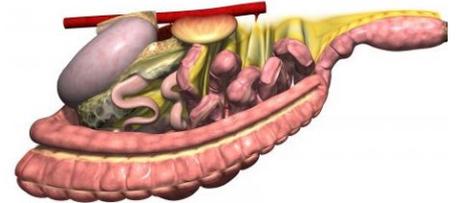
## What it is, how to recognise it and how to treat it

### What is colic?

'Colic' is a general term used to describe any form of abdominal pain. It covers a whole range of conditions, from mild medical issues to life threatening surgical lesions. Colic can be very scary for both horse and owner to experience and it is important to know the signs and when you need to talk to your vet.

### What causes colic?

There are many different causes of colic! In some cases we can identify a cause, but in many cases the initial cause remains unknown. Certain types of colic are linked to husbandry, such as sand colic from grazing on sparse sandy pasture, impactions in horses on box rest or gassy spasmodic colic just after turn out onto new pasture. Horses that crib bite are prone to epiploic foramen entrapments whilst older, overweight horses are more prone to strangulating lipomas. Worm damage and diarrhoea will also cause colic. Horses have around 100ft of intestines - which is a lot of intestine to go wrong! Intestines are also very mobile, meaning they can move about, become trapped or twist, all of which can cause colic. Abdominal pain can also be caused by other organs, such as the liver or kidneys.



*Horses have a lot of intestine to go wrong!*

### What are the signs of colic?

- Lying down
- Pawing
- Rolling
- Kicking the abdomen
- Weight shifting
- Grinding teeth
- Flank watching
- Dull, depressed

### What do I do if my horse has colic?

Your safety is the most important thing in a colic situation - do not put yourself at risk by approaching a dramatically colicking horse. Leave them in their stable or field until the vet arrives and can assist you. If you can, put them in a well bedded stable where they are less likely to injure themselves if they roll. Rolling has never been linked to a 'twisted gut' and it is safer for everyone to allow your horse to go down, if that's what they want to do. All horses react differently to colic - for example, a stoic pony is less likely to show pain than a more sensitive thoroughbred, even if they have more severe disease. As soon as you notice signs of colic then call your vet for advice.

### How do we work up a colic case?

When your vet arrives to see your horse, they will initially take a history and then observe your horse to see the extent of their colic signs. Then, we perform a full clinical examination, assessing gums, pulse, heart and respiratory rate, gut sounds and temperature. Usually we will then perform a rectal examination, which your horse may need sedating for, so we can feel for any obvious abnormalities in where the intestines are sitting. In many cases we will pass a stomach tube up your horse's nose to see if there is fluid in their stomach, called reflux. In some cases we may sample the fluid that sits around the intestines by performing a 'peritoneal tap.'

### How do we treat colic?

Mild medical colic can be easily managed in the field with pain relief and anti-spasmodics to relax the intestines, as well as nasogastric fluids. However, more serious colic can require referral to a specialist hospital for further tests and possibly surgery. Colic surgery can cost between £3000-7000, and is a major undertaking for both horse and owner, so it is worth considering if this is an option for you before you are forced to make a decision in a stressful situation.

If you are worried that your horse or pony may be colicking, please give us a call at the Centre on 01977 652280 as this can be an emergency and may require urgent veterinary care