

What is it?

The term 'colic' means abdominal pain and we mostly presume it's gut pain. However, other abdominal organs such as the liver, kidney or spleen etc. can be involved. Colic often occurs after a change in management, such as changing feed or your horse's turnout pattern. It may also occur when there has been a lot of grass growth.

Whilst some colic can be treated at home, more severe cases may need hospitalising or surgery. In some cases colic can be fatal, so early diagnosis is key.

Causes

Colic can be caused by spasms (cramps) of the intestine; excess gas or food material can cause the intestinal lining to stretch, or a part of the gut twisting or getting stuck somewhere and cutting off its blood supply.

Non-intestinal problems can present as colic such as laminitis, bladder or ovarian problems.

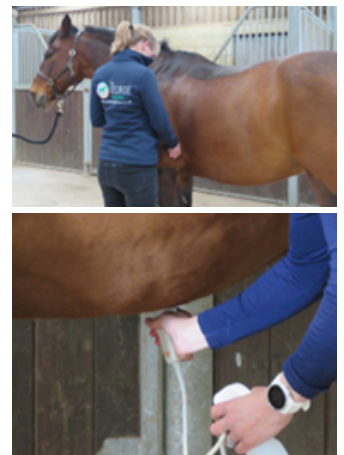
Signs

- Mild; inappetence, restlessness, lip curling, pawing the ground, flank watching
- Moderate; lying down and getting up constantly, lying on their side for long periods, standing
- Severe; violently rolling, sweating, heavy breathing

If you think your horse has colic, please call your vet immediately.

Treatment

Your vet will conduct a clinical exam, checking gum colour, taking heart and breathing rate and checking temperature. They will listen to your horse's guts and then may also want to perform a rectal examination to assess the gut. Pain relief and a muscle relaxant are often given and sometimes sedation. Your vet may pass a tube into the stomach to check for a full stomach (horses can't vomit) and/or give fluids. Your vet will often ask you to starve your horse following a colic episode and may want to see your horse again to make sure the problem has resolved. In more severe cases your vet may advise hospitalisation, surgery or, in extremely severe cases, euthanasia.

**Prevention**

- Feeding routines consistent; make dietary changes gradually over 2-3 weeks
- Keep turnout routines as consistent as possible; stabling horses for increased periods of time increases your horse's risk of colic. If your horse is on box rest for any reason try to encourage your horse to drink and monitor feed intake and number of droppings.
- Effective parasite control; please speak to us to discuss a recommended worming programme for your horse
- Regular dental care