

Colic

Colic is one of the most dangerous and costly equine medical problems, estimated to occur in 1 of every 10 horses each year. There seem to be countless reasons why horses get colic. Things which are difficult for horse owners to control include breed and age of horse along with geographic region of the country where the horse is kept. Other factors include:

- Change in diet
- Grain intake
- Eating sand
- Spoiled Feed
- Restricted water access
- Change in activity
- Transport
- Parasites
- Administration of Wormer
- Previous history of colic

The signs of colic are quite variable – remember colic is the term given to any horse showing abdominal pain. Signs could depend on the cause of the colic and could be:

- Rolling and Restlessness
- Lying down
- Getting up and down
- Flank watching
- Lip curling
- Backing into corner
- Kicking at belly



Parasitic load has long been stressed as a potential cause of colic. There are several ways that internal parasites could cause colic symptoms in horses. Two of the most obvious include damage to the blood supply and blockage in the digestive system. Therefore, it is recommended that horses be

wormed regularly and the type of wormer should be rotated. There is a link between access to pasture and the incidence of colic in horses. There is a significant decrease in horses getting colic if the animal had access to pasture. Horses have the desire to graze in a continuous manner, however stabled horses are routinely fed their forage in two distinct meals (morning and evening). They may not be receiving adequate roughage to maintain proper hindgut function. Horses are often fed restricted amounts of hay and chaff hay to maintain or reduce weight.

Since horses seem to have an absolute requirement for forage in the diet to prevent colic, it is recommended that a minimum of one kg of dry forage (hay/pasture) per 100 kg of body weight per day is provided. For horses confined to stalls, the selection of lower calorie hays or chaff (grass-type) will provide the horse more kg of hay and mimic the continuous feeding behaviour during grazing.

When horses are fed chaff rather than hay there is often a reduction in the quantity of fibre fed, as chaff is very light and fluffy compared to hay. A 20 litre bucket of chaff only weighs a little more than a flake of hay. This means it is common to feed less chaff than you would if you fed hay, and this is especially important in horses that are stabled full time. Another consideration is that chaff is mainly short fibre compared to the long fibre in hay and there is a higher risk of colic in horses fed all their fibre as short cut chaff. Do not feed mouldy feeds to horses and store feed to minimise the likelihood of moulding. Other toxic substances occasionally ingested with forage can also cause colic. The addition of large quantities of grain to the diet is a potential risk factor for colic.

Colic is a veterinary emergency! It is very difficult to tell from the outside whether it is just a bit of gas or something as traumatic as twisted bowel (only treatment surgery). As horses are often in serious pain, early treatment gives better outcomes and the horse can hurt itself when reacting to the pain of the colic. So you need to call your veterinarian, take away feed and water and prevent the horse from hurting itself.