

## The many faces of COLIC

Colic in horses is simply abdominal pain although horse owners typically refer to colic as problems with the gastro-intestinal tract. There are numerous causes of colic, but generally they are related to the anatomy and the microflora of the horse's gastrointestinal tract. Some common causes include:

- High grain based diets/low forage diets
- Moldy/tainted feed
- Abrupt change in feed
- Parasite infestation
- Lack of water consumption leading to impaction colics
- Sand ingestion
- Long term use of NSAIDS and/or Antibiotics
- Stress
- Dental problems
- Ulcers

Just as there are many causes, every horse is different in how they react to pain. Some of the more common signs are:

- Pawing
- Rolling
- Excessive sweating
- Distress
- Lethargy
- High respiration and heart rate
- Loss of interest in food and water
- Peculiar postures(Stretching out like they have to urinate, sitting)
- Bloated appearance
- Flehmen behavior curling of upper lip) and grinding teeth
- Absence of gut sounds or excessive gut sounds
- A colicky foal may not show typical signs of colic. Instead, it may lay on its back with its legs tucked.
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Colic is related to many different maladies and include:

\*Stomach distention-the small capacity of the horse's stomach makes it susceptible to distention.

\*Displacement-The mobility of the intestines can predispose them to become twisted or displaced. It can also be caused by gas build up. Either way, displacement colic needs immediate surgical treatment.

\*Impaction colic-Can be induced by coarse feed stuff, dehydration, or accumulation of foreign material like sand.

\*Gas colic-Excessive gas can be produced by bacteria in the gut after ingestion of large

amounts of grain or moldy feeds.

\*Spasmodic colic-Painful contractions of the smooth muscle in the intestines.

\*Enteritis-Inflammation of the intestine possibly due to bacteria

Treatment:

The severity of the signs of colic is not necessarily indicative of the severity of the colic, so one should always have a veterinarian evaluate a horse as soon as possible.

While you are waiting for your veterinarian, you should:

- Observe your horse and monitor vital signs. Remove access to feed.
- Let the horse rest as much as possible. It is not necessary to walk the horse unless the horse is rolling and endangering himself or people.
- Do not administer any medication without the direction of the veterinarian.

Most colic cases can be treated on the farm with medication and the use of a nasogastric tube to alleviate gas and administer medications. However, some may have to go to a clinic or hospital to receive fluids or surgery.

Prevention:

Most preventive measures are self-explanatory. For example, if an abrupt change in diet caused a problem, make sure to make dietary changes gradually in the future. Some other measures include:

\*Feed on a regular schedule

\*Clean fresh water should always be available.

\*Keep feed boxes and hay racks as well as buckets clean and free of mold and dust.

\*Check teeth regularly.

\*Provide plenty of exercise.

\*Feed plenty of good quality forage (at least 50% of total diet).

\*Keep feed off the ground to avoid sand ingestion.

\*Practice an effective parasite control program that fits each individual horse. Have fecal egg counts done on each horse at least once a year.

Colic can happen even with the best care, but by following these basic principles you can minimize the risks.