

American Association of Equine Practitioners

Horse Health Education

# COLIC

Minimizing its Incidence and Impact in Your Horse

www.aaep.org



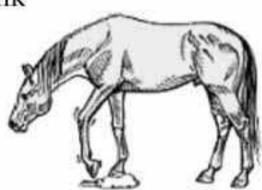
#### OVERVIEW



- Colic is the number one killer of horses, but most cases of colic are mild and resolve with simple medical treatment.
- Colic is not a disease; it is merely a symptom of a disease. Colic is defined as any abdominal pain that can come from any abdominal organ and not just a GI abnormality.



- Leaving food; absence of appetite
- Repeatedly lying down
- Turning the head toward the flank
- Pawing
- Kicking or biting at the belly
- Repeated rolling
- Sitting in a dog-like position
- Stretching out; posturing to urinate





- Holding head in an unusual position
- Lack of bowel movements
- · Reduced or absent digestive sounds
- Inappropriate sweating





- Rapid breathing and/or flared nostrils
- Elevated pulse rate (greater than 50 beats per minute)
- Depression
- Lip curling unrelated to sexual interest



- Call your veterinarian
- Remove all food from the horse, leaving some water
- Keep the horse in an area where it can be watched
- Allow rest or walk the horse around if it is continually rolling or in danger of hurting itself
- Always continue observation



#### IMPORTANT INFORMATION THAT OWNER MAY OBTAIN

- Specific signs of colic, and their severity
- · Pulse or heart rate
- Respiratory rate
- Rectal temperature
- Color of the gums
- Moistness of the gums





#### IMPORTANT INFORMATION THAT OWNER MAY OBTAIN

- Capillary refill time (normal is 1 to 2 seconds)
- Digestive sounds (if any)
- Bowel movements
- Recent changes (diet, exercise, etc.)
- Medical history





#### THINGS TO AVOID

Do not administer any medication or procedure to a colicing horse without first consulting with your veterinarian.

- Passing any kind of tube into the horse's stomach
- Giving the horse any substance by mouth, particularly liquids
- Inserting anything into the horse's rectum
- Giving intravenous injections



#### VETERINARY EVALUATION

- Accurate history (may include feeding and deworming programs, vaccination schedule, etc.)
- Review of your observations
- Complete physical examination (vital signs and intestinal sounds)
- Rectal palpations
- Passage of a nasogastric (stomach) tube for presence of reflux



#### VETERINARY EVALUATION

- Collection of abdominal fluid (peritoneal or "belly" tap) may only be necessary in some cases
- Blood tests
- Evaluation of response to treatment
- Ultrasound (transrectal or transabdominal) to evaluate abdominal organs

normal left gut





normal right gut



#### CLASSIFYING COLIC



Impaction

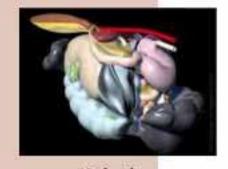


Right dorsal displacement of the colon

1. Intestinal Dysfunctions. The most common category, includes spasms, gas distention, impaction and decreased motility. Often responds well to medical treatment.



#### CLASSIFYING COLIC

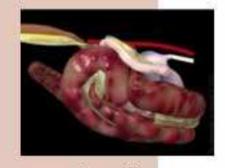


Volvulus

2. Intestinal Accidents. These occur less frequently and include twists and entrapments as well as infarctions, emboli and clots, which may restrict blood flow to certain parts of the intestine. This category almost always requires surgery.



#### CLASSIFYING COLIC



Enteritis

3. Inflammation or Ulceration. This category is named according to the bowel segment involved. Caused by stress, medication, infection and parasites. Medical treatment is generally required.



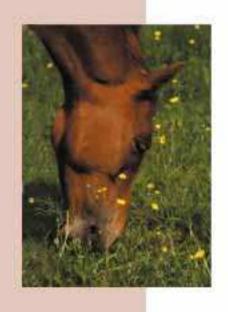
#### TREATMENT



- Pain-relievers (analgesics or sedatives)
- Fluid therapy by intravenous or nasogastric routes
- Laxatives (mineral oil)
- Tranquilizers (acepromazine, detomidine)
- Surgery



#### PREVENTION



- · Estabish a set routine
- Roughage is extremely important in the horse's diet in helping to prevent colic and over-feeding grain
- Limit the amount of grain-based feeds
- Divide the daily concentration ration
- Establish a parasite control program
- · Provide exercise or daily turnout
- Proper dental care



#### PREVENTION

- · Make any changes to the diet gradual
- Provide clean, fresh water
- Avoid giving your horse medications unless prescribed by your vet
- Check hay, bedding, pasture and environment for potentially toxic substances
- Avoid feeding on gravel or sand for fear of consuming with ration



#### PREVENTION

- Reduce stress (change in environment)
- · Pay special attention to animals when transporting
- Observe foaling mares (pre- and post-foaling)
- Pay particular attention to horses with previous bouts of colic
- Maintain accurate records



#### SUMMARY

- The key to minimizing colic is good management.
  To minimize colic impact, identify the problem early and call your veterinarian immediately.
- Treat every incident of colic as potentially serious.
  Mild GI upsets and colics requiring surgery may start out with very similar outward signs.



Photos courtesy of:

The Glass Horse, LLC,

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Dana Zimmel, DVM, DACVIM, DABVP

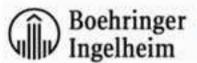






The AAEP would like to thank our partners for their support of the of the AAEP Owner Education Programs.







**Animal Health** 











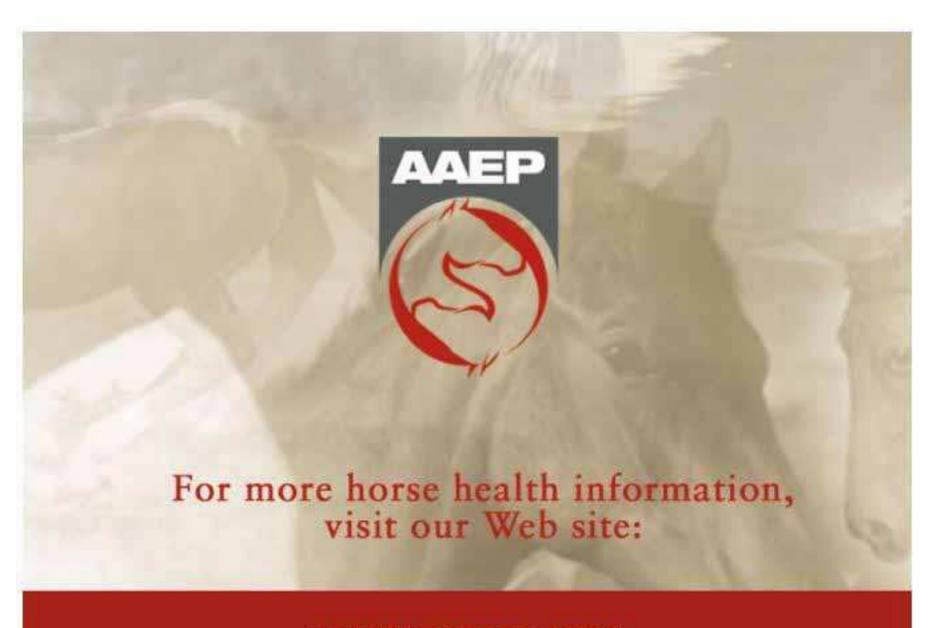








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