

## Colic

Colic simply means 'pain in the abdomen' and therefore has many different causes. It may be serious or even life-threatening, but most horses with colic recover fully and uneventfully.



### SIGNS OF COLIC:

- lying flat out
- pawing at ground
- rolling
- kicking at belly
- looking at belly
- poor appetite
- tooth grinding
- sweating
- restlessness
- stretching
- posturing to urinate.



- The gastrointestinal tract in the horse is 25-30 metres long in total and consists of the stomach, the small intestine and the large intestine.
- Depending on which areas are affected, clinical signs will vary in their nature and severity.
- Most cases will respond to medical treatment such as painkillers, relaxants and fluids, but occasionally surgery is necessary to correct the problem.
- Your vet may wish to perform an internal examination, pass a stomach tube or take a sample of blood or fluid from the abdomen in order to gather further information. In a small minority of cases, euthanasia may be the only humane option.
- Please remember that, however quiet and well behaved your horse is in usual circumstances, a horse in pain may unexpectedly roll or kick out and you must consider your own safety when handling a horse with colic.

### TYPES OF COLIC:

- **spasmodic** - due to feeding/management changes, parasitism (worms), stress, heat, drinking very cold water;
- **impaction** - similar to constipation, may be due to dry diet, dental disease, reduced water intake or box rest;
- **displaced/twisted intestines** - may require surgery under general anaesthesia;
- **other less common causes** such as tumours, infections, liver disease, grass sickness, gastric ulcers.

### NORMAL CLINICAL MEASURES IN THE HORSE:

- heart rate: usually between 25-45 beats per minute, depending on the size, type and fitness level of the horse;
- respiratory rate: usually between 8-12 breaths per minute;
- temperature: approximately 37.5°C - 38.5°C or 99-101 Fahrenheit is normal for a horse;
- intestinal sounds: should be present all over the abdomen;
- gums: should be pale pink and moist.



### Before the Vet arrives:

- take away any food or water present;
- walk the horse in hand if safe to do so;
- if possible, have a stable ready with clean bedding and good lighting;
- warm water may also be useful;
- do not give any painkillers or other drugs unless requested to do so.

### Prevention of Colic:

- maintain a regular management and feeding regime where possible;
- practice effective parasite control;
- discourage windsucking behaviour which predisposes to gas build-up;
- provide a diet with plenty of fibre (hay, haylage or grass).

**XL**equine  
Excellence in Practice

XLVets Equine is a novel and exciting initiative conceived from within the veterinary profession made up of independently owned, progressive veterinary practices located throughout the United Kingdom, members of XLVets Equine are committed to working together for the benefit of all their clients.

© XLVet UK Ltd.

No part of this publication may be reproduced without prior permission of the publisher.

For further information contact your local XLVets Equine practice:

[www.xlvets.co.uk](http://www.xlvets.co.uk)