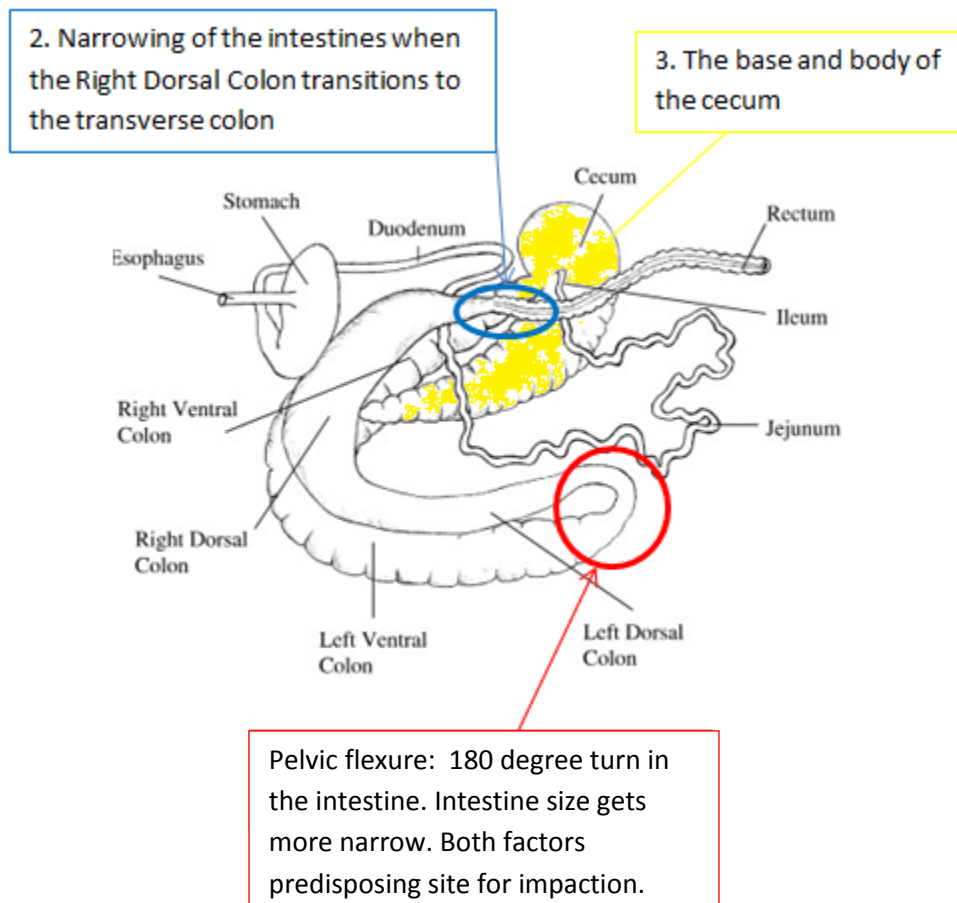


Colic

What is colic and why does it happen?

Colic is a broad term used to describe abdominal pain. The source of the pain is a very long list. To make things even more complicated, causes of colic aren't limited to things in the abdomen. For example, muscle diseases can cause a horse to appear colicky.

However, the majority (about 80%) of colic cases are due to either an impaction or excessive gas buildup and result in mild to moderate colic signs. Gas colic has many causes and is simply a buildup of gas in the intestines resulting in the horse feeling uncomfortable. An impaction is when feed or fecal material are unable to normally pass through the intestines. The material gets stuck and starts piling up, preventing the movement of anything else. This usually occurs when there is a narrowing of the intestines. The pelvic flexure of the left dorsal colon is the most common site for impactions because of the drastic 180 degree turn in the bowel. Below is a picture of the equine gastrointestinal tract and the three most common sites for impactions to occur.



Why is colic important?

Just as colic has many different causes, colic can have many different outcomes. Colic can be mild and resolve spontaneously, or so severe that the horse dies within hours. Colic can be the first sign of poor management, poor hay quality, or an infectious agent; all of which can lead to more horses on the same farm experiencing colic. Colic associated with pregnancy could be the first sign of an abortion or dystocia. Regardless of the cause, it's important to recognize colic since veterinary attention and treatment could be the difference between life and death of the horse.

What does colic look like?

Mild to Moderate

- Decreased appetite or even weight loss if the colic has been going on long enough
- Depressed
- Lying down
- Standing abnormally/stretching
- Looking back at belly/flank area
- Frequently standing up followed by lying down
- Kicking at abdomen
- Pawing at the ground

Severe

includes all the signs of mild and moderate colic in addition to:

- Extremely depressed or extremely agitated
- Sweating
- Lying down excessively
- Rolling vigorously

What can I do to prevent my horse from colicking?

- Provide a consistent source of fresh, available drinking water.
- Maintain a diet that is at least 60% forage (hay or grass).
- Make any changes, exercise or management, gradually.
- Reduce ingestion of sand by feeding off the ground and minimizing dropped feed
- Include oral/teeth exam in regular veterinary care. Poor oral health can result in inadequate chewing, predisposing to impaction.
- Avoid overcrowding pastures:
 - Crowding induces stress
 - Crowding results in overgrazing, which increases the sand/soil ingestion while grazing
- Check pasture, stalls and barn area for poisonous substances such as blister beetles, noxious weeds (cocklebur, mustard seed and acorns) or foreign material (bale twine)
- Consulting with your veterinarian about parasite control, feeding strategies and ulcer treatment is also recommended toward the prevention of colic.

What should I do if a horse is displaying signs of colic?

