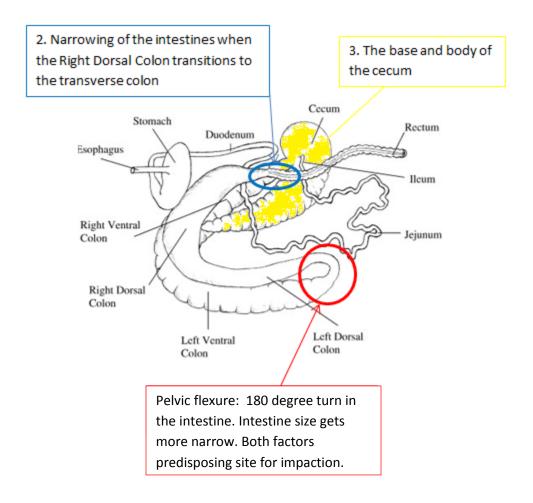
Colic

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?

- o Provide a consistent source of fresh, available drinking water.
- o Maintain a diet that is at least 60% forage (hay or grass).
- Make any changes, exercise or management, gradually.
- o Reduce ingestion of sand by feeding off the ground and minimizing dropped feed
- o 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.

Remove feed, calmly and safely walk horse or observe the horse closely in a confined area away from other horses. Gas colics have been known to respond to trailer rides.

Pass feces and starts looking better

Not getting better; not passing feces. Starting to look worse.

Great! Return feed and normal routine. However, it's important to attempt to determine why the horse colicked. Poor feed quality, consuming too much sand, limited access to water or a drastic change in routine can all lead to colic and should be changed to avoid another

episode. Call and consult a veterinarian if concerned.

Sudden signs of Severe Colic

Remove feed. Safely and calmly try to walk horse to keep it from rolling and to attempt to alleviate some pain.

Important to prevent rolling, because rolling can lead to twisted intestines.

Call the veterinarian.

Try to remain calm: calling a supportive friend/family member might be beneficial, especially if you're trying to manage the situation by yourself.

Be honest about the history of the horse and the course of events leading up to the colic.

Be prepared with a trailer or means of transportation for the horse.

Veterinarian arrives to perform diagnostic tests. Usually diagnosis is performed by passing a nasogastric tube, sometimes performing a rectal exam, a quick physical exam and obtaining a thorough history about the horse. Many different diagnostic methods exist, but the above are the most common in colic. Treatment typically consists of:

- Medication to provide pain relief, Flunixin meglumine (banamine) is a common medication used.
- Sometimes a medication called Buscopan is used to alleviate gut spams.
- Fluids given through a nasogastric tube or through an catheter in a vein
- Laxatives like mineral oil or Epsom salts given through the nasogastric tube.
- Continue handwalking and removing hay/feed until the horse passes manure.
- The horse should improve within 12-24 hours. If not, then the horse should be referred to a hospital

80% of cases will respond the treatment.

20% of colic cases cannot be managed on the farm. The recommendation is made because the horse needs intensive management that a hospital is best at providing or the horse needs surgery to correct the colic.