

Horse Colic

Horse colic isn't a disease, it's just a sign of pain in your horse's belly. Learn what to do to help your horse!



What is Colic? And Why Should I Worry About It?

Colic isn't a disease, it's just a sign of pain in your horse's belly. There are a few different kinds of horse colic, but usually—and don't laugh—it's gas. In fact, there's even a type called "flatulent colic."

But seriously, colic can be dangerous—so you should learn how to spot it.

Remember the last time you guzzled a soda really fast or woofed down two slices of pizza in record time? You a little...uh...full, right? If you weren't in a fancy restaurant or sitting in class (or maybe even if you were!), you might have let loose a pretty good burp. Ahhh.

Well, your horse can't burp. Or throw up, for

that matter. So when she gets a belly full of gas, it hurts. Sometimes a lot. Most of the time, colic will go away and your horse will be fine. But sometimes, colic can be very serious.

Did You Know?

Horses can't burp. Or barf. So gas is kind of a problem.

For more information about horse colic, make sure you visit our website at prevent-horse-colic.com. You'll find tons of articles, videos and other stuff that will help you spot, manage and prevent horse colic.

Colic Signs And Symptoms

How can you tell if your horse has a belly ache? She'll let you know by acting, well, kind of weird.

If your horse is acting weird, get in touch with a responsible adult.

Your horse needs to be treated by a veterinarian.

You know your horse. And she depends on you.

You're with your horse a lot, so you'll probably notice when she doesn't feel good. The best tool you have for diagnosing colic is your eyes! Watch your horse carefully:

- Does she seem nervous or anxious? Is she sweating for no reason?
- Is she pawing the ground or turning to try to bite her flanks?
- Some horses stretch their necks or shake their heads when they're feeling "colicky."
- What's going on butt-wise? Is she twitching or swishing her tail?
- Has your horse eaten? Pooped? As you know, eating and pooping are a big part of your horse's day...any changes here should be noted!



Horse colic rule number 1: Call a responsible adult if you're worried about your horse. Rule number 2: Don't feel like a dork, a dweeb or a geek. Make the call!

How Can I Prevent Colic?

Help your horse get in touch with her wild self!

Any horse can colic, but there are ways you can reduce the chance that it will happen to yours. Here are 5 things you can do.

1. Food. Remember that your horse is a grazing animal. That means she should have hay or grass available all the time—unless your veterinarian says different. Pasture is best, but that's not



always possible. If you feed your horse grain, spread the feedings out over time instead of giving her one or two big meals. Be sure her teeth are in good shape—she can't eat if she can't chew!

2. Water. She should always have fresh water to drink. In winter, use a stock tank warmer to keep the water above 55 degrees. If your horse doesn't drink enough, that long trip through her digestive tract will not go smoothly—food can dry out and get stuck, causing another kind of colic known as an impaction.

3. Friends. Horses are herd animals and if they are isolated, they get lonely. Lonely horses get stressed out and stressed out horses are more prone to colic. Horses really like other horses, but guess what—they like donkeys, goats and cats, too.



4. Exercise. In the wild, horses walk and walk—all day, actually. If your horse is confined to a stall, it can affect her digestion and that can—you guessed it!—cause a colic episode. Allow your horse as much pasture time as you can. If she's stabled due to illness or injury, walk her daily if your veterinarian allows it.



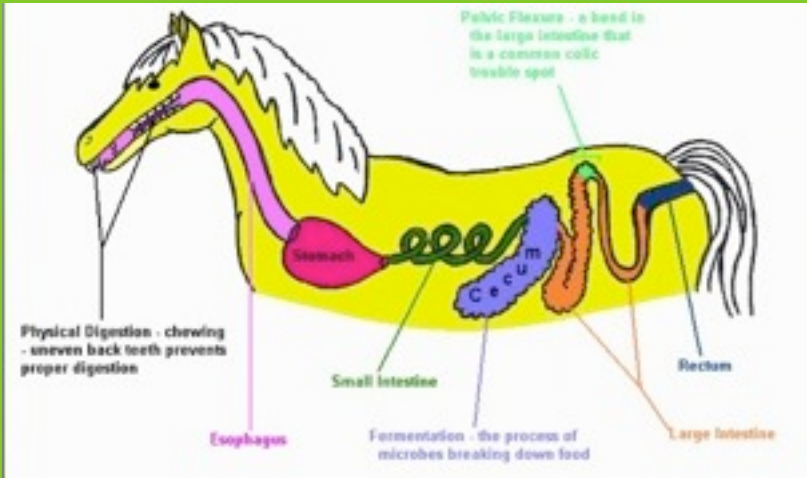
5. Consistency. Horses do not like change. Food changes, water changes, herd changes, even weather changes...bad, bad, bad and bad. If you must make a change to your horse's schedule, do it gradually. Change feeding schedules over a 1 to 2 week period and if you're traveling with your horse, bring water from home. Add pasture mates carefully and under an adult's supervision.

Did you know? Horses should drink about 8 gallons of water a day.



What's Going On In There?

A Guide To The Inside Of Your Horse



What Do You Know About Your Horse's Digestive System?

Most of us are familiar with what goes into our horses and what comes out of our horses, but a lot goes on in between.

When your horse eats, her teeth grind the food up in small pieces. This pulverized food blob moves down her throat to her stomach where it gets mixed with digestive acids and partially digested.

From there, our food blob travels to the small intestine, also known as the upper gut, where nutrients start to get absorbed. This part of the trip happens pretty quickly and now the food enters the cecum where it starts to ferment.

The cecum and the large colon form a digestive team known as the large intestine or hindgut. Fermentation is important because it produces special

nutrients that are important to your horse's health, but fermentation can also cause gas colic, especially if your horse ate too fast or went too long between meals.

But back to our food blob. It's now exiting the large colon, on its way towards the small colon. From there, it's just a short trip through the rectum and then out it goes, ready for your muck fork.

Did You Know?
Your horse's digestive tract is over 100 feet long.

Most colic-causing digestive problems happen in the large colon or small intestine.

And that's the straight poop about horse poop.

Practice taking your horse's vital signs when she's calm and relaxed.



Healthy Horse Vital Signs

Learn to take your horse's vital signs. These include her temperature and her heart and respiratory rates. You should also know how to do a dehydration pinch test and capillary refill test, listen to gut sounds and know what healthy mucous membranes look like.

To do these tests, you'll need a thermometer, a stethoscope and a watch with a second hand.



Do not try to do any of these procedures without practicing them with your veterinarian first! And never do them when your horse is scared, sick or in pain. When your horse feels bad, she can kick, bite or lash out at you! Call a responsible adult or your veterinarian if your horse is showing signs of pain or illness.

The more you practice, the better you'll be when the time comes to use these skills in an emergency. But until your veterinarian tells you that you are ready to perform any of these techniques in an emergency—**DON'T**. You could hurt yourself or your horse, so no kidding around. Bad idea.

OK. Lecture Over. Let's Get Started!

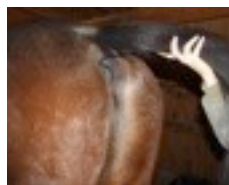
Taking Your Horse's Vital Signs

Ask your veterinarian how to do these tests:

Take your horse's temperature.

Have an assistant hold your horse. Lubricate the tip with petroleum jelly. Move her tail to the side and gently insert the tip to a depth of about 2 inches. Hold the thermometer in place and do not leave the thermometer unattended. Some horses will fidget during this less-than-thrilling invasion of privacy. If

she shifts her weight around or swishes her tail, try letting go of her tail; that helps sometimes. It takes about 2 minutes for a regular thermometer to get a reading and about 30 seconds for a digital or electronic one. Normal temps range between 99 and 101 degrees Fahrenheit. Call the vet if her temperature is over 102 or below 99.



Take your horse's heart rate.

Stand on the left side of your horse, facing her left elbow. Place the bell of the stethoscope behind her elbow and press it into her armpit. Listen for the "lub" and the "dub," the 2 parts of her heartbeat that count as a single beat. Look at your watch and count the beats in a 15 second period. Multiply the number by 4 to get "beats per minute." Resting, an adult horse should have a heart rate of 40 to 50 beats per minute.



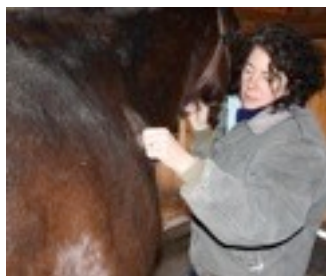
Take your horse's respiratory rate. Walk to the front of your horse and put the bell of the stethoscope in the center of her throat, 6 to 8 inches below her throatlatch. Count the number of breaths (in and out as one) and multiply the number by 4 to get "breaths per minute." It should be between 8 and 15 breaths per minute. More than that can mean a fever or pain.



Did you know? Younger horses have faster heart rates.

Look at the mucous membranes that line your horse's eyes, gums and nostrils. They should be a little paler than your own and moist looking. Healthy looking mucous membranes mean your horse's blood is circulating normally.

Take the pinch test to see if your horse is dehydrated. Pinch the skin around your horse's neck. It should flatten right back into place in less than a second. If the skin doesn't spring back into place that fast, your horse may be dehydrated. Make sure she has clean water and let someone know if she won't drink. Dehydration can cause colic!



Press your horse's gum to do the capillary refill test (CRT). Lift your horse's lip and press your thumb into her gum. This leaves a white mark because you pressed the blood out. If your horse's circulation is good, the spot should turn back to pink within 1 or 2 seconds.



Listen to your horse's gut sounds. Lay your head on your horse's barrel, just behind the last rib. Press your ear close and listen for gurgling. Be sure to listen to both sides! There should always be gut sounds—gurgles, bumbles, rumbles and grumble—if you don't hear anything, it could be a sign of colic.



Here we go again: DO NOT attempt these tests if your horse is sick! Someone—and by someone we really mean YOU—could get hurt!

Emergency Plan:

Get ready for an emergency before it happens!

1. Put important numbers on speed dial and post them EVERYWHERE. Don't rely on your memory and be sure everyone who takes care of your horse knows who to call if your horse gets sick.

2. If your horse is acting weird, make the call!
The absolute no-questions-asked first thing to do is call a responsible adult and get in touch with a vet. Don't stop calling until you reach somebody!

3. Remember that your horse is in pain and may not act normally. She may not want you to touch her. She'll be scared or really, really cranky and may kick or bite. Don't try to comfort or walk her. When she feels better, she'll make it up to you!

4. Tell the vet what you see.
Report the symptoms: tail swishing, flank biting, neck stretching, pawing, getting up and down, rolling, sweating, not eating or pooping.

5. Give any other information.
If you know, tell your vet when your horse was wormed. Let her know if your horse is taking any medications or if her schedule has changed lately.

6. Don't worry if you don't know.
If you don't know the answers to any of these questions, don't worry. Just try to stay calm and give as much information as you can.

7. Write down emergency numbers:
Before you forget, write down 3 emergency phone numbers. Right here. Now. No kidding.

Prevent-Horse-Colic.com

Your Source For Reliable, Unbiased Horse Colic Information



For more information about horse colic, make sure you visit our website at prevent-horse-colic.com. You'll find tons of articles, videos and other stuff that will help you spot, manage and prevent horse colic.