



Colic....a real pain in the gut!

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Without a doubt, colic is the number one reason horse owners (and their veterinarians) lose sleep at night. While most horses are very resilient when it comes to showing pain due to injury, horses are very sensitive when it comes to abdominal pain. There is nothing that will wake you faster than seeing a horse in abdominal distress.

The term "colic" simply refers to anything that causes abdominal discomfort. Clinical signs may include loss of appetite, depression, stretching, repeatedly posturing as to urinate or defecate without urinating or defecating, curling the upper lip, pawing the ground, looking at their flank, laying down, rolling, getting cast in their stall and even throwing themselves to the ground.

Risk factors that are known to increase the incidence of colic include:

- Inadequate parasite control-Nothing has reduced the incidence of colic more than the development of oral paste de-wormers.
- Chronic water deficiency-Lack of water causes the digested feed material to become dry and hard, complicating passage through the intestines. Horses that are group watered are **less likely** to colic.
- High concentrate diet-For every 5.5 pounds of grain fed per day, the risk of colic is doubled over horses that are not fed grain. At least 60% of a horse's diet should be grass or hay.
- Sudden diet change-Horses are 5-10 times more likely to colic within 2 weeks of a sudden change in hay. Changes should be made gradually over a period of 7-10 days.
- Transport-Stress associated with transport increases the incidence of colic, especially if grain is fed immediately prior to transport.
- History of previous colic-Horses that have suffered colic in the past are 4 times more likely to suffer a repeat episode.

Research suggests that the normal incidence of colic is 4-10 cases per 100 horses per year. In other words, if you have 10 horses, every year you should expect 1 or less colic episodes or, your horse has a 4-10% chance of colic each year. If your horses are experiencing a higher-than-average annual colic rate, there may be some modifications in daily routine that can help reduce colic on your farm.

Of course, if your horse is suffering from colic, you should call your veterinarian as soon as possible. Some episodes of colic that begin as uncomplicated cases can become serious if not evaluated and properly treated. Fortunately, most causes of colic are uncomplicated and respond quickly to medical treatment. However, a small percentage of cases will require surgery, and the earlier that decision is made, the more successful the outcome.