

Veterinary Vignettes

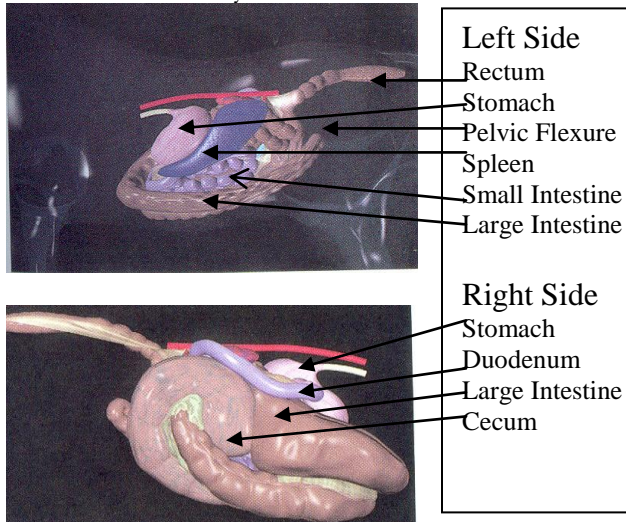
Colic

(That Which Strikes Fear in the Heart of Owners)

F. Richard Lesser, DVM
The Equine Clinic at Oakencroft

”Colic” refers to abdominal pain of any origin. While there are diseases outside of the gastrointestinal tract that can present as colic (kidney and bladder stones, myopathies, rabies, etc.) generally horses with colic have pain originating from the gastrointestinal tract. The GI tract is a large, complex yet delicate system. The causes, signs and treatment of colic are equally complex.

Anatomy of the Gastrointestinal Tract



Causes of Colic

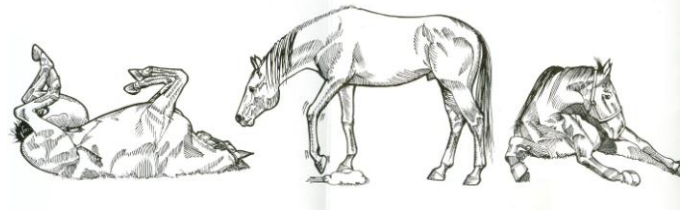
- Parasites continue to be a major cause of colic
- Nutritional causes (irregular feeding, poor quality feeds, inadequate water, toxins)
- Gas distention, motility disturbances
- Infections
- Gastric Ulcers
- Twisted, herniated or displaced bowel
- Impactions
- Dental problems causing inadequate chewing

Treatment of Colic

- **Treatment will depend on the cause of colic**
- Some respond to walking and mild analgesics
- Some will require oral fluids or laxatives
- Some will require intravenous fluid therapy
- Some will require surgery

Colic Hints

Obtain the horse’s vital signs before calling the veterinarian. Discuss medications with your veterinarian before administering them to your horse. Inappropriate treatment may confuse the matter, or even result in a negative outcome.



Signs of Colic

Looking at Flanks
Pawing
Kicking/Biting Flanks
Stretching
Urination Posture
Lying Down
Rolling, Dog-Sitting
Increased Manure
Decreased Manure
Off Feed
Sweating
Decreased Gut Sounds
Increased Pulse
Increased Respirations
Depression
Lip Curling (Flehmen)
Cold Extremities

Evaluating the Horse With Colic

The **pulse rate** is a great indicator of the severity of colic. The normal rate is about 40 bpm. The pulse can be obtained by listening behind the left elbow with a stethoscope or by palpation of an artery. Your veterinarian would be happy to teach you how to obtain this most important piece of information.

Manure production, hydration state, appetite, attitude, temperature, mucous membranes and gut sounds all give important clues as to the cause and severity of the colic.

If the above indicators warrant a visit from the veterinarian, further diagnostics are performed. **Nasogastric Intubation** would assess outflow problems from the stomach and small intestine (horses cannot vomit). A **Rectal Palpation** would be used to identify displaced, distended or impacted bowel. An **Abdominal Tap** would evaluate the fluid bathing the bowel and reflects compromised intestine. An **Ultrasound Exam** would further clarify the state of bowel not readily palpable by rectal exam. **Blood Work** would identify the physiological state of the horse as well and infections, parasites, organ function. **Gastroscopy** would identify ulcers in the lining of the stomach.