



Quality and Concern in Equine Practice
Serving Colorado Springs and Southern Colorado

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Colorado Equine Veterinary Services,

A full-service, equine wellness, critical care and ambulatory practice.

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- ◆ Preventive Medicine
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Colic, the number one killer of horses!

Colic is a combination of signs that alert us to abdominal pain. The signs can range from mild to severe. These signs should never be ignored. Many of the conditions that cause colic can become life threatening in a short period of time.

Usually the intensity of the pain directly correlates to the severity of the problem.

Horses with violent pain most often have a serious problem.

“While abdominal pain can be the result of a variety of conditions, with horses, the term colic is used to

describe pain associated with an intestinal obstruction and/or distension.”

In mild cases, symptoms may be subtle and easy to miss. For example, a horse may just stand or lie down

and look at its flank.

Diagnosing the exact cause of colic can be difficult. Over 80

different intestinal problems may cause abdominal pain. Other problems, such as liver, muscle or kidney diseases can have symptoms similar to those seen with colic.

All horses exhibiting abdominal pain (colic) should be considered at risk for a life-threatening emergency.

Common Symptoms of Colic

- Restlessness- pawing, repeated getting up and lying down, rolling over
- Kicking at the belly
- Looking at the flank
- May adopt a dog-setting posture
- Lying down and getting up carefully
- Appears lifeless, drooping head, depressed
- Weight loss
- Unable to gain weight regardless of diet
- Decreased appetite
- Watery diarrhea

“In the mild cases the horse may just stand or lie down on its sternum and turn its head to look at its flank, mainly looking at the left side. It may get up and walk around with the head down and then lie down again. They usually refuse to eat and

sometimes will go to a water source and “play” in it with their lips. As the severity increases, the evidence of pain increases. The animal will begin to sweat. Its breathing will become more and more labored. It will go down and roll from side to side, often kicking and striking as it rolls. It will get up and immediately go down again." *A.J. Newman, DVM*

At the first sign of colic

- * Alert your veterinarian immediately!
- * Be ready to provide a detailed history to your veterinarian. Colic History Form
- * Remove feeding
- * Provide water
- * Allow horse to rest, if it will

* Some walking may help. Excessive walking is unnecessary and may tire the horse.

* Keep your horse under close observation.

Remember, “pain killers” mask the symptoms; they are not a cure for colic, be careful not to be misled into thinking that the problem is fixed.

Preventing colic

Safe management practices mimic how horses feed in the wild. Good management is key to prevention.

- Make any management and feeding changes gradually.
- Establish a consistent feeding and management routine, stick to it.
- Provide frequent turnout and consistent daily exercise.
- Feed multiple times during the day versus one big feeding.
- Feed a good quality hay as a staple.
- Keep the amount of grain fed to a minimum.
- Avoid sand accumulation by not feeding on sandy soils.
- Implement a vet-approved parasite control program.
- Allow access to clean, fresh water at all times.
- Watch mares at foaling time and horses which have suffered previous bouts of colic.

Levels of Severity	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Heart Rate (beats per minute)	40 to 60	60 to 80	Over 80
Respiratory Rate (breaths per minute)	20 to 30	30 to 40	Over 40
Temperature (degrees F)	99 to 100.5	99 to 100	Under 99/ Over 100.5
Gum Color	Pale Pink	Pale Pink	Bluish or Purple
Capillary Refill Time	1-2 seconds	2-4 seconds	Over 5 seconds
Gut Sounds	normal/increased/absent	decreased/absent/may be increased	absent
Feces	may be normal	small, hard fecal balls/normal/or no fecal production	none or profuse
Passing Gas	maybe	maybe	none or profuse
Pain Level	sweating, intermittent pawing/looking at belly/lifting hind leg/stretching	same as mild but continuous plus may try to roll	all other signs plus uncontrollable, continuous attempts to roll/thrash
Contact Your Veterinarian	If your horse exhibits 2 or more of these signs for more than 30 minutes	Immediately	Immediately