



Ark Vet Centre

Equine Newsletter



November 2023



Welcome to the November newsletter, the weather has definitely turned and the dark mornings and nights are with us. This month we are discussing colic in particular the types of colic that are common over winter and the practical changes we can make to reduce the risks of it.

Winter Colic

As winter approaches it's crucial to be aware that there is an increased risk of certain types of colic (such as impactions) as the colder months bring changes in feeding, water consumption and activity levels which can all contribute to the development of colic.



Key things to consider to reduce the chance of colic:

- **Hydration**—this is key especially in preventing impactions as if the horse becomes dehydrated it can cause droppings to dry out making it more likely an impaction (blockage) could occur within the intestines. Horses don't like drinking cold water so ensuring they have fresh, warmed (if necessary) water is important and consider adding extra water to hard feeds to increase water intake that way.
- **Diet**—ensuring it is consistent and any changes are made very gradually. This is more tricky as we go into winter as they have less turn out on grass and more time spent in the stable eating hay and the coarser fibres found in hay are more likely to cause impactions than the softer fibres found in grass.
- **Exercise**—regular exercise and movement is important, impactions are most commonly seen in horses that are stabled for long periods of time.

Clinical signs of colic you need to watch for:

- **Changes in behaviour**—restlessness, lying down, pawing, turning to look at their abdomen, rolling.
- **Decreased appetite or inappetence**—finding hay left in the net overnight is a warning sign

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- **Sweating and elevated pulses**
- **Reduced number of droppings passed**—or passing drier and smaller droppings are all signs that your horse may have an impaction.

If you see any of these symptoms then we would recommend you calling us as a visit will likely be required.

What happens when the vet arrives?

We will carry out a full clinical examination in particular to assess:

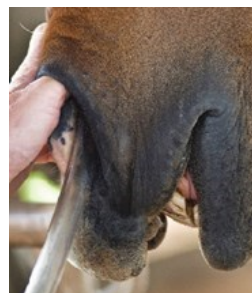
- **Gut sounds**—usually reduced in an impaction as the guts slow down due to the blockage. Usually increased in cases of gassy colic.
- **Heart rate**—usually elevated when they have colic.
- **Gums**—to check they are pink and moist and there are no signs of dehydration starting.
- **Internal exam**—a rectal examination will often take place especially when we are concerned there could be an impaction. This allows us to assess the size and location of the impaction and to check the intestines are sitting where they should be.

Once we have established the sort of colic we will usually administer pain relief into the vein. In some cases we will give Buscopan into the vein (usually in gassy colics to settle the guts down) and in the case of an impaction fluids may need to be administered.

Fluids

We will usually give fluids via a tube up the horse's nose (a nasogastric tube) this tube is advanced slowly all the way into the stomach. Warm water and electrolytes can then be given down this tube to try to soften the impaction helping it pass through the horse's system. This will often need to be repeated a number of times sometimes 3 or 4 times a day for a couple of days until droppings start to be passed. Some horses will tolerate this procedure but a lot will require sedation.

Most colics if caught early can be managed at your yard and will lead to a full recovery but looking out for early warning signs and keeping management and diet as consistent as possible over the winter is essential.



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