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COLIC IN HORSES

Symptoms, Treatments, and Preventions

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What is Colic?

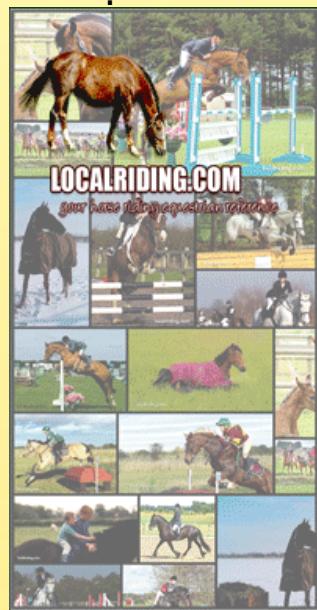
Speed, agility, muscle, and power are just four of the many characteristics that make horses amazing creatures. Because of their unique makeup horses are used for many different skills. Some breeds are used for racing such as Thoroughbreds, Arabians, and Quarter Horses. Other breeds are used for work like the Belgians, Clydesdales, and American Cream Draft. Just like people, dogs, cats, and any other animals that share characteristics in the species, horses too share similarities despite the different breeds. One characteristic that is shared is the sickness called colic.



Colic is a disease within the digestive system of the horse (PetMed). There are two different types of colic: idiopathic and non-ideopathic. The differences between the types of colic is the known and unknown cause of the colic in the horse. Under these two categories of colic are more specific types of colic. Under idiopathic colic are types: spasmodic and impaction. Under non-ideopathic are types: intussusception, gastric rupture, and strangulation (Succeed). It is important to know what colic is, how to recognize it, and how to treat it in order to keep horses safe and healthy. Horse owners and caretakers and veterinarians must make sure they understand colic and its effects on horses to provide the best care. Without the best care and conditions horses can face unnecessary sickness or even death which is why it is vital to understand colic.

Symptoms of Colic

When a baby is sick, hungry and thirsty, tired, or wants something, they will find a way to tell you. Whether they communicate through crying, screaming, or reaching out, eventually the parent is able to figure out what is needed. The same thing happens with horses. When a horse is sick it is important to listen to what they are trying to say. Colic has many signs that a horse will give, making it obvious to see. The most obvious symptom of colic is the horse reaching around to their side and trying to bite at their stomach (Blue Cross for Pets).



SYMPOTMS OF HORSE COLIC			
<i>The horse will sweat, become restless, paw the ground, try to roll, get up and down several times, bite at its sides, kick at its belly, show a change in its manure, or fail to defecate.</i>			
VITAL SIGNS			
	MILD	MODERATE	SEVERE
Heart rate (beats per min.)	40 to 60	60 to 80	over 80
Respiratory rate (breaths per min.)	20 to 30	30 to 40	over 40
Temperature (degrees Fahrenheit)	99 to 100.5	99 to 100.5	under 99/over 100.5
Gum color	pale pink	pale pink	bluish or purple
Capillary refill time	1 to 2 seconds	2 to 4 seconds	over 5 seconds
Gut sound	normal or increased	decreased frequency	absent
Feces	normal	small, hard fecal balls	none or profuse diarrhea
Passing gas	yes	no	no
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 pain

Just like a child holding their stomach when they have an ache, so will the horse try to reach their stomach when it hurts. A few other strong outward symptoms include rolling, kicking at the stomach, and stretching. If these signs are repeated often and close together, then it is a sign the horse is in discomfort and must

be checked on immediately. Another symptom is an increased breathing and body temperature (Blue Cross for Pets). With an increase in body temperature is a sign that the horse's body is fighting a sickness, just like human body's do. The shortness in breath is also a sign of internal struggle because the body is unable to intake a strong amount of oxygen at once. Other symptoms physical symptoms are increased heartrate and sweating. All of these symptoms are unusual for a horse to do repeatedly, so when it is noticed action must take place

Causes and Treatments



Colic is not an abdominal sickness that should be ignored. Rated as the number one killer in horses, colic must be quickly treated (AAEP, 2018). There are different levels of colic that can start as non-threatening and go to life-threatening. Mild cases of colic can be treated with antibiotics that a vet prescribes. Severe cases may require emergency surgery.

The first step in deciding how to treat your horse if they have colic is to run tests and figure out where the pain is located. From there the diagnosing the type and severity will allow for the following steps to be determined. If the cause of the colic is gastric then

typically the first treatment is to walk the horse until the pain has subsided. Walking allows the digestive system to work and move (Ramey, 2017). The movement will cause the gas to eventually leave the horse. The gastric can also be caused by overeating of grains. Because horse grain is a source of energy and nutrient boost, too much at once can send the horse's digestive system into shock. Thus, cause the digestive system to work harder. A second cause of colic is parasites or tapeworms. Like any animal it is very important to de-worm them in order to prevent from parasites entering their digestive system. The parasites in the intestine can cause the intestine to slide into itself making it very dangerous for the horse. Parasites can also build up together and cause blockage within the horse. The blockage will then prevent blood circulation (Succeed). The most common treatment for tapeworm will be medications and making sure the horse is hydrated, but the sliding of the intestine can require surgery. A third cause of colic is strangulation. This is a condition where the horse's intestine or colon is twisted (Succeed). The strangulation is the most severe cases of colic.



If the horse has a twist in its gut then emergency surgery is vital to the horse's survival. The reason for emergency surgery is due to the cut off of blood that portion of the horse's body. Without the circulation of blood, the digestive system will back up and slowly die. This is obvious to determine because it will cause severe pain for the horse. Approximately five to ten percent of reported colic situations result in surgery (Horse and Hound).

Preventions

Colic is a danger that every horse owner and vet must be aware of in order to protect the horse's health. It is important to take all necessary steps in order to prevent colic from happening. Here are a few preventions:

- Daily routines
- Quality and nutritious feed
- Quantity of daily rations
- Exercising daily
- Lock feed away from horses
- Provide fresh food and water daily (AAEP)

These are just a few precautions that can help decrease the likely hood of colic happening. Sometimes colic can arise even when all precautions are taken, which is why it is important to know what to do when it does. For further information and interest contact local vets and/or visit and of the sources provided at the end.



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