

COLIC TOPICS

Risk Factors for Colic

Colic is one of the most common causes of emergency treatment in the horse. The term colic is a broad definition for abdominal pain and there are nearly 100 different conditions that can cause colic in the horse. These causes can range from problems with a portion of the intestinal tract (such as a large intestinal displacement) to problems with the liver (such as a stone in the bile duct), the uterus (such as uterine volvulus), problems with the scrotum (such as scrotal herniation), etc. Intestinal problems are without question the most common cause of colic, but it is important to remember that other organs in the abdominal cavity can cause colic as well.

Factors associated with increased risk of colic:

- 1) Medical History: A history of previous colic has been identified as a risk factor for colic as well as horses with history of previous surgery for colic.
- 2) Farm Management Factors:
 - A) Diet is widely regarded as a risk factor for colic. Current evidence suggests that changes in diet such as a change in batch of hay, change in type of grain or concentrate, or feeding hay from round bales may increase the risk of colic in horses.
 - B) Constant access to fresh water is important to prevent colic.
 - C) Stabling practices can contribute to colic. Changes in stabling can predispose to colic especially a change from being kept in a pasture to being kept in a stall.
 - D) Changes in activity level have also been shown to predispose to colic.
- 3) Preventative Medicine Factors:
 - A) There has been no documented association between dental care and colic although dental disorders are thought to contribute to certain kinds of colic (such as choke or large colon impactions). Therefore routine dentistry is important to your horses health.
 - B) In general, good parasite control will decrease the risk of colic. You should consult with your veterinarian on a deworming program for your horse.
- 4) Weather: There are conflicting reports of an association of colic with weather. Some reports have shown an increase in colic during warmer months while other reports show an increase of colic in colder months. Likewise, investigators have not been able to establish a relationship between incidence of colic and ambient temperature, change in ambient temperature, change in barometric pressure, mean monthly temperature, or mean monthly rainfall. Most veterinarians would suggest that there is an association of colic and weather-related factors, but it has not been confirmed.

Summary: Much work remains to identify the many causes of colic. In the population of horses that are referred to our hospital for colic, the most common factors associated with the onset of colic are a change in diet, a change in environment or a change in exercise in the preceding 2-4 weeks. On the other hand, there are also a fair number of horses that are referred into the hospital for colic that have not experienced any of these changes.

One of the most important things to remember about colic is to have your veterinarian help you establish a feeding program and a deworming/preventative health program and make any changes in the program very slowly and with your veterinarian's advice. Also, at the first signs of colic in your horse, contact your veterinarian right away.