

# Colic in the horse

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## What is Colic?

Colic is when the horse shows signs of pain in its abdomen. There are many different causes of colic, but other than when the symptoms are mild and short lived, it always warrants a visit from your vet.

## How do I know that my horse has colic?

### Horses with a mild case of colic may show:

- Reluctance to eat
- Flank watching and pawing the ground
- General restlessness, sometimes lying down and getting up repeatedly
- Stretching out as if to pass urine or faeces



### Horses with more severe pain may:

- Kick their bellies and sweat up
- Lie down and roll, sometimes violently

## What do I do if I think my horse has colic?

- Call your vet. Other than in very mild cases, colic is an emergency and we need to see the horse as soon as we are able
- Take all feed away from the horse
- Leave the horse in a quiet, calm environment with a deep bed
- Take out any fixtures in the stable on which the horse might be able to hurt itself if it rolls
- Monitor the horse until the vet arrives, taking note of any droppings that are passed

## Should I walk the horse?

- If the horse has signs of mild colic, then walking may relieve some of the symptoms and encourage the guts to start moving normally
- If the horse has severe signs of pain DO NOT walk the horse. In the past it was recommended that owners walk the horses to stop them rolling and 'twisting their gut'. This is no longer thought to be true and walking a very distressed horse may put the handler at risk of injury.

### **Penn Equine Vets**

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## How will the vet help my horse?

- The primary aim for the vet is to determine whether your horse can be managed medically with pain relief or muscle relaxants, or whether it requires surgery.
- The vet will listen to the horse's gut sounds, take the pulse and carry out a clinical examination. Where the symptoms are more severe, the vet may also carry out a rectal examination to feel the horse's intestines, pass a stomach tube and sometimes take a blood sample or a sample of fluid from the horse's abdomen
- In the majority of cases colic symptoms can be managed with medical treatments carried out at your premises. If the symptoms are more severe, or the examination identifies a particular problem, then the vet may recommend that the horse is referred to a hospital for more intensive treatment or even for surgery

## How can I try to prevent colic?

- Try to keep your horse in a regular routine as any change in diet or management increase the chances of your horse developing colic
- Always ensure that your horse has clean drinking water available, especially on hot days or after exercise
- Make any changes to feed gradually
- Ensure your horse is up-to-date with its worming schedule as some worm infestations are linked to certain types of colic
- If your horse is on box rest, try to encourage the horse to take lots of water by soaking hay and adding water to hard feed



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