

UNDERSTANDING COLIC

Types
Risk Factors
Risk Periods



Feeding
Recommendations

4 different types of colic

- 1 **Impaction** - Caused by blockage in the intestine
- 2 **Spasmodic** - Characterised by increased intestinal contractions
- 3 **Tympanic (gaseous)** - A build-up of gas in the intestine
- 4 **Sand** - Inflammation or blockage of the intestine resulting from ingested sand

Colic Symptoms

- Sweating
- Kicking or biting at the stomach
- Lying down or rolling repeatedly
- Uncomfortable, reluctance to eat
- Reduced or no passing of droppings
- Lack of gut noises or Excessive gut noises/gurgling

RISK FACTORS

1. Meal Sizes
2. Dietary Changes
3. High Levels of Cereals or High Starch Feeds
4. Changes in Forage
5. Hydration Levels

RISK PERIODS

Changes in management tend to occur simultaneously with the seasons, typically autumn and spring.

Spring - transitioning from winter hay/haylage to grass. Fibre content in spring grass is lower than hay or haylage. This is a major change for the digestive system to cope with.

Autumn/Winter - Similarly to spring, the main consideration is a change in moisture content, as well as a change in nutrient levels.

If you suspect that your horse has colic, contact your vet straight away!!

Diet tip: did you know?

The risk of colic is significantly higher two weeks after a change in forage and/or concentrate feed. Multiple changes in either throughout the year increases the risk further. Adaptation to a new concentrate or forage feed, particularly if there is a significant difference in the protein, starch and/or sugar level, is now thought to take a minimum of three weeks. Therefore it's recommended to make feed changes slowly over 2 - 4 weeks in order to lessen the challenge to the gut.

Cereals/High Starch Feeds

Consuming more than 5kg of concentrates per day has been associated with a greater than 6 times increase in colic risk as have diets including more than 2.7kg of oats. Unfortunately, horses on high starch or cereal diets are often also compromised by having sub-optimal forage intake, often restricted turnout time and higher levels of exercise. Cooking cereals by micronisation or extrusion, gelatinises the starch content, improves utilisation in the foregut and so reduces the risk of undigested starch entering the hindgut where it can cause problems.

General Feeding Recommendations...

- With the exception of oats, if feeding cereals, only use **cooked cereals**, preferably **micronised or extruded** to make their starch content more digestible.
- Oats are generally fed "raw" as they are easily chewed and their simpler starch structure is more easily digested than that of other cereals.
- Make any dietary changes **slowly over 2 - 4 weeks**
- Feed **plenty** of fibre
- Fibre helps maintain a **healthy microbial population**
- **Pushes out any excess gas** which sits in the gut
- **Increases pH of hindgut** compared to starch
- **Retains water** which will reduce incidence of dehydration
- Keep **meal sizes small** and where possible, keep **starch and sugar levels low**
- Feed **digestive enhancers** such as those found in **Fibreugenix feed balancers** during periods of high risk

Feeding Recommendations - Tympanic (gaseous) Colic

1. Hay is preferable over haylage type products which produce more gas.
 2. Take care with access to Spring or rich pasture.
 3. Avoid long spells of inactivity. Keep horse moving to encourage gut motility eg turnout on poor pasture
 4. Provide ad lib forage - keeping fibre moving through the gut helps to remove gas.
 5. For good-doers, divide hay into small rations throughout the day to keep forage passing through.
 6. Avoid feedstuffs that ferment more quickly and produce more gas in the gut. eg haylage.
- Feed meadow hay - not too soft/green but also not too stalky/fibrous .

Feeding Recommendations - Impaction Colic

1. Dental health is an essential consideration. For older horses ensure fibre sources are easy to chew.
2. A contributing factor can be a lack of water intake/moisture in the diet. Monitor especially during winter when water consumption tends to be reduced.
3. Plenty of water and physical movement (e.g. turnout and/or exercise) helps promote gut motility.
4. Ensure hay is soft and digestible; haylage can be fed as it's typically more digestible as can grass.