

# Stable talk

January 2018



## Colic

Colic itself is not a disease; rather, it is a group of clinical signs which indicate that your horse is uncomfortable. Most likely, this discomfort is related to the gastrointestinal tract, but horses can also show signs of colic with conditions affecting other parts of the body. Examples may include respiratory disease, a severe hoof abscess, or pregnancy complications.

### Signs of colic in your horse

Colic signs can range from obvious to very subtle. Classic signs include pawing, flank watching, kicking at the abdomen, getting up and down, refusing to stand up, and rolling. More subtle signs can include continual yawning, sweating, muscle tremors, and a flehmen response (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Flehmen response**  
([www.15minutehorsefix.com](http://www.15minutehorsefix.com)).

Some horses with colic may show none of these signs; a horse might be standing with its head down, being unresponsive, shaking, and/or not acting like himself. Some horses tend to look "sick," but they can still be colicking.

### Common Causes

The most common type of colic in horses is spasmodic colic. Spasmodic colic typically involves mild gas build up in the intestine or an inappropriate increase in intestinal motility. A specific cause has not been identified, but spasmodic colic has been associated with rapid changes in diet.

There are numerous other causes of colic related to the gastrointestinal tract. The likelihood of each type of colic will vary depending on factors such as the horse's age, deworming history, breed, environment, and profession. Some of these causes of colic include the following:

- **Displacement** – this is when the intestinal tract moves to an inappropriate location within the abdomen. There are various forms of displacement that can occur. Sometimes, a displacement can be corrected through medical therapy. However, at times, surgical intervention is required to correct the displacement.
- **Volvulus** – this is when the intestinal tract rotates on itself, compromising its blood supply. Unfortunately, surgical intervention is required when a volvulus develops.
- **Impaction** – this is when a blockage develops within the intestinal tract. Often, this can be corrected with medical therapy including IV fluids and oral fluids through a nasogastric tube.
- **Gastric ulcer syndrome** – various areas of the stomach can develop ulceration. The only way to definitively diagnose this condition is with gastroscopy.
- **Intussusception** – this is when one part of the intestine telescopes into another

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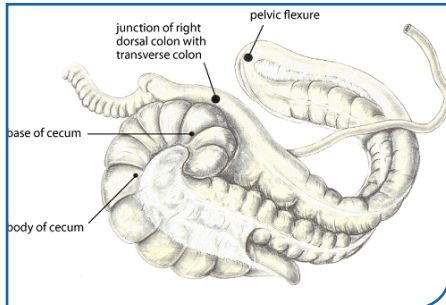
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part of the intestine. This is almost always a surgical condition. Although an intussusception, in theory, may become undone with medical therapy, there is a very high likelihood that it doesn't become completely untrapped and/or that it will recur. (Figure 2)



**Figure 2: Intussusception** ([www.merckvetmanual.com](http://www.merckvetmanual.com))

## Diagnosis

When your horse is showing colic signs, a veterinary evaluation starts with a thorough clinical exam including heart rate, temperature, mucous membrane colour, and gut sounds. This is often followed by a dose of pain relief. Sometimes, if the colic pain is severe, pain relief may need to be administered before it is safe to complete a thorough

physical exam. Most spasmodic colics will respond to one dose of pain relief. If the horse does not respond, further diagnostics and therapeutics may be necessary. These could include:

- Passing a nasogastric tube into the stomach of your horse to see if there is excess fluid present. If so, this could indicate a small intestinal lesion. If no excess fluid is present, a bolus of fluid can be given to help stimulate motility.
  - Sedation and more aggressive pain relief
  - Performing a rectal exam to note if anything unusual can be palpated within the abdomen
  - Taking a faecal egg count and a blood sample
  - In the clinic
  - Ultrasound of your horse's abdomen
  - Completing a belly tap to collect fluid from within the abdomen which helps us assess the health of the intestines
- All of these diagnostic tools can help your vet assess whether the horse should be referred to a hospital straight away, whether the problem can be treated with medical therapy including fluids and pain relief, or if your horse needs surgery to correct the problem.

## Take home message

- Call your vet immediately if your horse is showing signs of colic
- The sooner a horse is treated for colic, the better the prognosis

## Welcome back to Felicity and good luck to Lauren!

We know you will all join us in welcoming Felicity back to work after maternity leave! She will be available Tuesdays and Wednesdays for routine appointments.

Upon completing her internship on December 29th, Lauren is off to complete a six-month medicine fellowship at Hagyard Equine Medical Institute in Kentucky, USA. We are grateful for all of her hard work and wish her the best of luck!

# Auckland Area Calendar

January	Event	Location
1	Christmas Carnival New Years Day Races	Ellerslie Race Track
4-5/	Jill Ulrich SJ Clinic	Abderry
11	Blyth Tait SJ Clinic	Abderry
14	Inter Islander Summer Festival	Ellerslie Race Track
17/	Animal Stuff SJ and Dressage	Abderry
19	Friday Night Races	Alexandra Park
19	North Island Dressage and Para Championships	Clevedon Show Ground
24	Animal Stuff SJ and Dressage	Abderry
27	NZ Bloodstock Karaka Million	Ellerslie Race Track
27	AESI Auckland Anniversary Horse Trial	Woodhill Sands
31	Animal Stuff SJ and Dressage	Abderry