

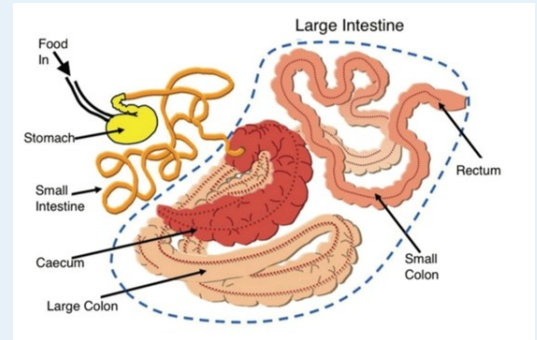
WHAT IS COLIC?

Colic is a condition that relates to pain in the abdomen (belly) and is something that most, if not all, horse owners have to contend with at some point. The word colic is derived from the word 'colon' which is a part of the intestines that all mammals have. There are many different types of colic such as spasmodic, impaction, displacement but all **MUST** be treated as an emergency.

Let's start by having a quick run down of the digestive tract of a horse.

The order is: Mouth - Oesophagus - Stomach - Small intestine - Caecum - Large colon - Small colon - Rectum.

The horse's intestines are huge and can easily weigh 200-250kg. The biggest part is the large colon as this is where the horse ferments ingesta. Bacteria break down the grass and hay and produce nutrients and gas. It is this gas production that can be a problem in many colics.



The horse's intestines

CAUSES

No one can ever fully answer this question but it often boils down to gastro-intestinal disturbance from management changes. For instance, problems can arise if gas production is excessive, such as when the grass suddenly grows or you change your horse's diet suddenly.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Unsettled - Attempts to lie down	Repeatedly rolling	Unexplained sweating	Box-walking or circling
Eating less / reduced droppings - Eating less / nothing		Passing fewer /no droppings	Changes in dropping consistency
Abdominal pain -	Flank watching	Pawing	Kicking at belly
Tired / Lethargic -	Lying down more than usual	Lowered head position	Dull and depressed
Clinical changes -	Increased heart rate	Reduced or absent gut sounds	
	Changes in colour of gums	Rapid breathing rate	

DIAGNOSIS / TREATMENT / MANAGEMENT

The examination:

History: Assess duration and details of colic, management changes, worming history, droppings, as well as the horse's age, breed, and timing to help determine the cause.

Physical exam : Quickly establish if the colic is medical or surgical using parameters such as:

Heart rate: Elevated with pain and shock.

Mucous membrane color/refill time: Assesses circulation & possible shock; abnormal colors may indicate severe gut issues.

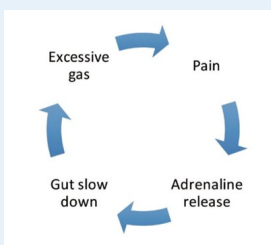
Rectal temperature: Slight rise with pain; significant increase suggests systemic illness.

Gut sounds: Lack of noise often signals a serious problem.

Rectal exam: Palpate for intestinal abnormalities but has limitations due to anatomy—only a small portion of the digestive tract can be palpated.

Pass a tube: Used to detect or treat blockages since horses cannot vomit; can administer fluids this way.

Depending on the findings, further diagnostics like blood tests, ultrasound, or surgery may be recommended.



PREVENTION

- *Change diet slowly over a 7-10 day period.
- *Keep up with your horse's worming – 80% of spasmodic colic is caused by tapeworms.
- *If your horse has colic take away ALL food.
- *Walk your horse with colic only if advised by the vet.