



Oakham Veterinary Hospital – Castration FAQ's

When is the best time to get my horse castrated?

Traditionally castration is undertaken during the spring or autumn of the yearling year, but can be done at any age. By doing it at this time of year you can avoid the flies and dust of the summer and mud and wet of the winter. Castration of suckling foals is also perfectly acceptable and in some cases can be much less traumatic to the individual. Most people choose to castrate between 6 months and two years old before sexual behaviour commences and because castration over this age can be a more complicated procedure.

Where should the castration be performed?

The majority of castrates are performed in the hospital, however in some cases it may be possible to do it at home. You should consult with one of our vets as to where the best location would be. We normally recommend that horses 3 years of age or older are only castrated in hospital circumstances.

What is involved?

For castrates performed at the hospital, horses are normally admitted the day before as it is important that it starved overnight prior to anaesthesia. To help avoid any complications during anaesthesia your horse will also be given a pre anaesthetic check. This involves checking the horses physical status such as temperature, pulse, respiration along with any current medication he is on and his general attitude. It is highly recommended that your horse has up to date vaccinations for tetanus – if this is not the case we can administer temporary protection at the time of the operation.

There are several different types of castration which can be undertaken either with the horse standing or after undergoing an anaesthetic. Standing castration involves deep sedation and a local anaesthetic injected into the testicles and scrotum. This method is slightly less expensive and avoids the risks of general anaesthesia. This method is rarely used in the hospital and the drawbacks include an element of risk to the handler and veterinary surgeon performing the procedure.

The recumbent method is by far the most common way to perform a castrate. This involves a general anaesthetic and its associated risks. Castration involves the removal of both testicles through open incisions in the scrotum. The most common technique used is the 'modified open' – once the testicles have been removed the wound is left open to allow for drainage and to minimise the swelling after the operation. The whole procedure should take no longer than 20 minutes.

We are also able to perform castrates by laparoscopy should the case require it.

What are the risks?

Unfortunately as with all anaesthesia there is an element of risk in the procedure. It is important to be aware that although the incidence of anaesthetic death is low in healthy individuals it can occur for no reason.

Other risks include haemorrhage from the surgery site, herniation/evisceration of the intestines through the wound, swelling around the surgery site, infection and peritonitis. Most of these are relatively uncommon, however swelling is normal after castration and is usually obvious for 3-5 days after the operation.

How long will it take for my horse to recover?

After the operation the horse is usually stabled for 24 hours to allow the horse to recover and the surgical site to settle down. The animal will be monitored regularly throughout this time by our team of nurses and interns. In the vast majority of cases the horse can be discharged 24-48 hours post-operatively. Once your horse is home it is very important that he moves around to minimise the swelling. If it is a young horse that is used to living in the field, this



level of exercise is sufficient as long as the field isn't too muddy. If the horse is stabled then a period of walking either under saddle or in hand is important for a couple of weeks after the surgery. The wound can take up to 3 weeks to heal completely and there is often a discharge for the first 10-14 days. Most castration wounds heal uneventfully and your horse should be back to normal within a month.