

Standing Sedation and General Anaesthesia

There are many procedures which may require your horse to undergo a general anaesthetic or standing sedation. There are several options available to anaesthetise the horse and this is chosen depending on the procedure being performed, length of surgical time, position of the horse required during surgery, as well as taking into consideration other factors such as the horse's health and age. At Wright and Morten, the majority of general anaesthetics that we perform are on healthy horses for routine procedures such as sarcoid removal or orthopaedic surgery and these typically carry a lower complication rate, when compared with anaesthetising a sick horse for colic surgery.

Here we will run through various options which may be discussed with you when your horse requires anaesthetising.

Standing Sedation

Here the horse is not fully unconscious, and they remain standing, usually in the stocks, under a consistent level of sedation. For short procedures such as dental work and joint injections, a one off intravenous injection of sedation can be used. For procedures that may take a little longer, we set up a Continuous Rate Infusion (CRI). This involves the horse having an intravenous catheter placed in the neck and then attached to a drip, which delivers a small amount of sedation at a continuous rate, whilst under constant monitoring. This allows for procedures such as sarcoid removal on easily accessible areas to be performed safely on the horse whilst it is still and calm. This method of anaesthesia is hugely beneficial as the horse does not need to lie down or get up after the anaesthetic and recovery times are much quicker, but not all larger procedures can be performed in this way.

Knock Down General Anaesthetic

Often used for short surgical procedures such as castrations, this is a handy method of immobilising the horse quickly. Similar to a general anaesthetic, the horse is thoroughly examined and given a sedative and pain relief medications to ensure they are calm and comfortable before the procedure. The horse is then induced and guided down in the padded knock down box where the surgical procedure will also be performed. They are left to recover and stand up in this knock down box, where they often stand quicker as anaesthetic gases have not been used.

General Anaesthetic

This is the most controlled and in depth method of anaesthesia and used for longer surgical procedures. Before performing a general anaesthetic the horse is thoroughly examined and prepared with sedatives and pain relief medications, prior to induction. The horse is guided down safely in a large padded room to minimise injuries and hoisted onto the padded surgical bed, where special pads and attachments to the table are used to position the horse comfortably. Once in theatre, the anaesthetic is maintained with anaesthetic gases and the horse is monitored closely and continuously by numerous methods to ensure a stable plane of anaesthesia. After the surgical procedure is complete, the horse is placed back in the padded knock down box where they will receive another sedative, to encourage the horse to stand safely when anaesthetic agents have worn off. Even though general anaesthetics carry a larger risk in horses than in small animals and humans, extensive measures are taken to reduce all of these risks and ensure the safety of your horse.