



General Anaesthesia

Why carry one out?

We carry out General Anaesthesia in horses to induce a state of unconsciousness so that the horse can no longer react to pain or stress and is unable to move; allowing more intricate or major surgery to be performed.



The Process

- Unless it is an emergency condition your horse will usually be starved for a minimum of 12hrs.
- Your horse will be weighed to calculate an accurate anaesthetic medication regime.
- The anaesthetist will check all the vital observations of your horse including heart rate, respiratory rate, temperature and gut sounds.
- A catheter is inserted to one of their jugular veins in the neck, for safe and effective administration of any medication or fluids required throughout surgery.
- The horse will then be given a pre-medication approximately 1 hr prior to surgery.
- Shoes will be removed (if not already done so), the feet are taped and mouth flushed.
- They are then taken into a large padded stable known as the "induction/recovery" box.
- An anaesthetic induction is then given. This is when our anaesthetist and nursing team assist your horse to lay down as safely as possible.
- An endotracheal tube will be placed in your horse's windpipe to in order to administer inhalation anaesthetic drugs and oxygen.
- They are then hoisted into the surgical theatre, where the surgery will be conducted. During surgery the heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure and other vital signs are recorded regularly.
- After surgery the horse is hoisted back into the recovery box, where our anaesthetist monitors them until they show signs of coming round.
- They are then left quietly in the recovery box to stand up.
- A member of the Blaircourt team will call you when the horse is standing safely.

The Risks

- The anaesthetic drugs cause reduced gut motility and can subsequently cause colic. This is often not long lasting but in some cases can be severe.
- Much like the risk with any other medication. There is a possibility that your horse could have an allergic reaction to one of the medicines.
- When horses are lying on their back or sides, their lungs don't work as efficiently, so it is not so easy for them to maintain suitable levels of oxygen in their blood. This is monitored during long surgeries.
- There is a small risk of muscle damage, thought to be caused by the pressure and lack of blood flow during anaesthesia. The effects of which are not often long lasting. The risks are reduced by padding on the surgical table and minimising the anaesthetic length.
- The anaesthetic drugs depress the action of the heart and other organs. Very occasionally a horse may be particularly sensitive to the drugs causing a cardiac arrest. Resuscitation of horses is very difficult and is often unsuccessful.
- Fractures, particularly of the long bones can occur during the anaesthetic procedure. Often in recovery a horse will attempt to stand up before it is ready. In order to reduce this risk your horse will be re-sedated prior to recovery.

Some of these risks are reduced by minimising the length of surgery where possible.

The type of horses that are most at risk of anaesthetic complications are:

- Those with emergency conditions such as fractures.
- Old horses
- horses with underlying illnesses.
- Pre-existing heart conditions

The Blaircourt team will do everything they can to reduce the risks of anaesthetic complications.

Speak to our vets

Should you wish to discuss any of your questions or concerns regarding your horse's general anaesthetic please let us know and one of our vets can discuss those with you.