

FACT SHEET

Castration Information



When to castrate?

Most horses are castrated as yearlings, however anytime after 6 months is acceptable providing both testicles have descended. When colts mature into stallions, and they reach 2 years old, the testicles become much larger and have bigger blood vessels which makes the castration procedure more difficult as they require ligation (tying off) of these vessels. It is normal to try and avoid the fly season from May to October as the castration wounds are left open and do attract flies which is a major cause of post castration infection.

How to castrate?

Well handled colts up to 18 months old can usually be castrated standing with heavy sedation. However if they are likely to kick or have unusually large testicles they will need to be “knocked down” and given a short general anaesthetic (GA) which makes the process safer for all concerned and allows the vet to tie off the large testicular blood vessels. The process usually takes 15 minutes and then a further 15-30 minutes for the horse to stand up again. An area of flat, clean grass, or a school surface is required. Mature stallions 3 year old and upwards are usually best castrated at our clinic where they can be given the GA in a padded room and checked overnight post-op for complications.

Post castration care

Routine care is simple but essential and without this complications are very common. The castration site wounds are always left open to allow the post-op swelling fluid to drain away. The removal of the testicles leaves a cavity which has to fill in and heal from the inside; this process produces inflammatory fluid which must be allowed to drain.

- It is **ESSENTIAL** that the wound is hosed **TWICE** daily for 5 minutes and a scab, if present, is wiped away (with some cotton wool in dilute Savlon or Hibbiscrub) to stop the scrotal skin edges sticking together and trying to heal and close. The wound must be kept open for at least a week. Failure to do this will allow the wound to close too soon and a large fluid swelling at the site and swelling of the sheath will occur. This will then require the vet to visit and reopen the site and put the horse on a course of antibiotics.
- It is very important that the horse is turned out to **EXERCISE** as this will reduce the amount of swelling of the sheath. Even with exercise it is normal for the sheath to swell to half a honey melon size. We normally recommend that the colts are turned out the same day as the castration but adult stallions are turned out the day after castrate.
- **Tetanus** cover is essential and if not vaccinated it will need an anti toxin injection to give immediate protection.
- **Pain relief** is recommended with ‘bute’ given twice daily for 5-7 days.
- Antibiotics are not routinely given as these surgeries are left open to drain and thus are not required.

Although castrations are considered to be a very routine procedure it must be remembered that in the horse they are a relatively major surgical operation with potential fatal complications such as haemorrhage and evisceration of small intestine through the surgical wound. These complications can be reduced to almost ‘theoretical’ providing the correct techniques are used in relation to the size, age and type of male horse being treated.

For owners the mainstay of care is **thorough cold hosing and cleaning** of the wound for at least a week and providing good **clean turnout exercise**. Contact with mares should be avoided for one month.