



Colic: What to do

Colic is responsible for 1 in 3 emergency equine veterinary call-outs and is a major cause of death or euthanasia in horses. Here at Oakham Veterinary Hospital we have teamed up with the University of Nottingham and The British Horse Society to bring you a series of informative articles about this important condition. Topics covered include:

- What is colic?
- Types of colic
- Recognising colic
- Colic: Causes and prevention
- Colic: What to do
- Colic: What will happen when the vet comes
- Critical colic cases
- Colic: The decision to refer
- Colic: Costs and insurance cover

In this article we focus on what you should do if you think your horse may have colic. You can find more information on this topic on The [British Horse Society's](#) website.

What to do if you think your horse has colic

Our article 'Recognising colic' discusses the signs of colic, including the subtle signs that some people might overlook. Here is our checklist of what to do if you observe any of these signs:



Vet

- Call the vet immediately, even if the signs of colic are vague or subtle – do not wait until you see 'classic' signs of colic such as pawing and rolling
 - Early veterinary assessment and treatment will:
 - Reduce the amount of time that your horse is in pain
 - Crucially, allow immediate referral of horses that need surgery or intensive care; in some cases, this
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- could make the difference between life and death
- If you are unsure whether your horse has colic or needs a vet visit, call the practice; our staff are trained to give you help and advice



Food

- Remove all food from the horse's environment
- If the horse is in a field, move it to a stable or an area where there is no food



Water

- If the horse is calm, allow continued access to water; otherwise, remove the water container if it is safe to do so



Hazards

- Remove all potentially dangerous objects from the horse's environment



Droppings

- Note the number and consistency of recent droppings



Rolling

- If the horse is persistently trying to roll, shut it in a well bedded stable or an area with a soft surface
 - Do not stay in the box with the horse
- Note that rolling does not cause twists ('torsions')



Exercise

- Gentle walking in hand for a maximum of 15–20 minutes may be helpful
- Do not exercise a horse that is trying to roll
- Do not force the horse to exercise
- Your vet will give you further advice about whether exercise is recommended, based on your horse's specific condition



Transport

- Arrange access to equestrian transport/hitch up your trailer/check that your vehicle starts – just in case the horse requires referral
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Medication

- Do not administer any treatment
 - It is extremely important that, when the vet examines the horse, no medication has been given



Observation

- Do not leave the horse unobserved for more than 15 minutes, even if signs of colic seem mild or vague



Assessment

- If it is safe to do so, only if you are experienced, and **after** calling the vet:
 - Take pulse and respiration rates*
 - Assess mucous membrane colour and capillary refill time*
- These assessments may give your vet important additional information and may help to differentiate colic from other conditions



Safety

- Be careful; horses in severe pain do not respond normally to people/handling
 - Wear a hard hat
 - If you are unsure whether it is safe to handle your horse, put him in a safe area and wait for the vet to arrive
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* Guidance on how to do this, as well as how to interpret your findings, are covered in our article 'Recognising colic'.

More information about what to expect when the vet arrives and about critical cases of colic is available in our articles 'Colic: What will happen when the vet arrives' and 'Critical colic cases'.

This newsletter was written by the Colic Team (John Burford, Janet Douglas, Gary England, Sarah Freeman) at the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science at the University of Nottingham. The newsletter forms part of our practice's commitment as a Vet REACT Colic Champion. The REACT Now to Beat Colic campaign, which is coordinated and funded by the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science at the University of Nottingham and The British Horse Society, aims to help horse owners to combat the life-threatening condition of colic. The REACT resources are based on research funded by the University of Nottingham and World Horse Welfare. Other materials available as part of this campaign include practice talks, Facebook posts, and free REACT factsheets and mini-guides.