



# Ark Vet Centre

## Equine Newsletter



❄️ February 2025 ❄️

Welcome to the February newsletter, following on from our previous newsletters on winter health conditions, this month we will be discussing the types of colic we often see over the winter. Sometimes after sudden changes in the weather we can see numerous colic cases over a few days. These are usually related to either changes in the grass or changes in management of the horse.

### Winter Colic

In the Winter the weather can fluctuate widely and often quite suddenly. In periods of very cold icy weather often horses won't get as much turn out, and as they don't tend to like drinking very cold water or if troughs are frozen they don't tend to drink as much as they would normally. If they are standing in more they move around less and their diet can suddenly change from grass + hay to just hay. All of these factors can make impaction colic much more likely.

Equally in periods of sunny and frosty weather, the frost can change the sugars in the grass so if horses are out grazing on frosty grass or eating grass that has been frosty for several days it can mean they are taking more sugars in / there are changes in the grass which can set off spasmodic colics (gassy colics) which are very common after changes in diet especially if the diet suddenly becomes more rich.



### Impaction Colic

Due to the anatomy of their guts, horses have a sharp bend in their large intestines called the pelvic flexure. If horses are not drinking as much, are eating drier forage like hay rather than grass, and not moving around as much they will be at a greater risk of getting an impaction here in their pelvic flexure. Reduced activity can reduce gut movement and drier forage makes it more likely to move more slowly through the intestines and the risk of getting a blockage at this sharp bend becomes higher.

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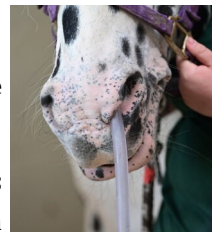
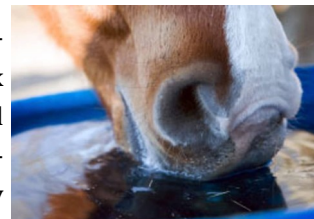
### Clinical signs and Treatment

- Usually a reduction in the number of droppings passed by the horse is the first symptom that's spotted.
- Often the colic signs are more mild so the horse may have a reduced appetite, but sometimes these horses still want to eat.
- Horses may spend more time lying down or may watch their belly but often won't be severely painful.



#### Treatment

- To diagnose an impaction often the symptoms are very typical of this type of colic but a rectal examination needs to be carried out to confirm the diagnosis where we can feel the size and location of the impaction.
- The horse should have all feed taken off it and be encouraged to drink so that there is no further food moving through the intestines adding to the impaction and hopefully by drinking more it should help to soften the impaction.
- The horse will be given pain relief to make it more comfortable.
- The horse will be stomach tubed with fluids to help soften and break up the impaction and encourage things to move through. This usually needs to be repeated several times until the horse starts passing droppings again and we can feel the impaction has cleared.



#### Prevention

The best way to prevent impaction colics is to try to avoid sudden changes in the horse's diet and management. Warming water to encourage drinking and adding water to make feeds mashy helps to keep things soft and moving within the intestines. Gentle exercise if horses are kept in with no turn out is important to try to encourage gut movement.

Impactions are better treated early whilst they are small so if you notice fewer droppings being passed or drier droppings you're better to get your horse checked by the vet to ensure there is no impaction starting.

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