

## What You Can Do to Reduce the Risk of Colic in Your Horse

Prevention is the best method to avoid the problems associated with colic. While horses seem predisposed to colic because of the anatomy and function of their digestive tracts, management can play a key role in prevention. Although not all types of colic are preventable, the following guidelines from the American Association of Equine Practitioners can maximize the horse's health and reduce the risk of colic:

- ⊙ Establish a set daily routine for feeding and exercise schedules and stick to it. REGULARITY of feed. REGULARITY of exercise. Make any changes in feed or exercise gradually over several days.
- ⊙ Feed a high-quality diet comprised primarily of roughage (high-quality, mold-free hay). Do not feed horses a 100% alfalfa hay diet (in California) because of the risk of developing enteroliths.
- ⊙ Feed two or more smaller feedings of grain or supplements rather than one large one to avoid overloading the horse's digestive tract. Hay is best fed free-choice.
- ⊙ Set up a regular parasite control program with the help of your equine practitioner. Have fecal samples tested to determine the effectiveness of the parasite control.
- ⊙ Provide exercise and/or turnout on a daily basis. Change the intensity/duration of an exercise regimen gradually.
- ⊙ Provide fresh, clean water at all times. In climate zones where water freezes, provide water that is warmed so that the horse will consume adequate amounts. A reduced water intake, combined with increased forage consumption can lead to a greater incidence of impaction and colic. Water should be maintained between 45 and 65°F and any ice crystals should be removed. **If you are in an area that has regular freezing, check the water supply twice daily as horses will drink eight to 12 gallons a day.**
- ⊙ OBSERVE your horse each and every day. How much has it eaten vs. how much has it passed?
- ⊙ Avoid medications unless they are prescribed by your veterinarian, especially pain-relief drugs (analgesics), which can cause ulcers.
- ⊙ Avoid the consumption of sand by feeding off the ground over rubber mats.
- ⊙ Inspect hay, bedding, pasture and environment for potentially toxic substances such as blister beetles, noxious weeds, and other ingestible foreign matter. Oleander is particularly toxic and problematic in California.
- ⊙ Reduce stress. Horses experiencing changes in environment or workloads are a high risk of intestinal dysfunction.
- ⊙ Pay special attention to animals when transporting them or changing their surroundings, such as at horse shows, trail rides, or other competitive events.
- ⊙ Observe mares before and after foaling for any signs of colic. Carefully watch any horses who have had a previous bout of colic as they may be at greater risk.
- ⊙ Maintain accurate records of management, feeding practices and medical health history.