



COLIC IN DONKEYS

Prevention is better than cure, and early treatment vital, so make sure you know the causes, signs and symptoms of colic.

Colic is a symptom of abdominal pain. Although this is commonly pain in the gastrointestinal tract, it can also be due to pain in other organs such as the kidney, ovaries, uterus and bladder.

The following kinds of colic may be seen:

- impactions or blockages of a part of the intestine with partially digested food, foreign bodies such as plastic bags or parasites (worms).
- spasms of the muscles of the wall of the intestine (spasmodic colic)
- collection of gas (flatulent colic)
- torsion of part of the intestine (twisted gut)
- painful conditions such as stomach ulcers, tumours or pancreatitis

**IF YOU SUSPECT THAT
YOUR DONKEY IS
UNWELL, CALL YOUR
VET IMMEDIATELY!**

SIGNS THAT A DONKEY HAS COLIC

The donkey with colic may only become dull and unwilling to eat.. The stoic nature of the donkey is such that signs of colic are usually less dramatic than those seen in a horse, such as rolling, sweating, pawing the ground. Just because the signs can be less dramatic it does not mean the donkey is feeling pain any the less.

Research at The Donkey Sanctuary suggests that a significant percentage of donkeys reported to its veterinary department as being just 'dull' are diagnosed with colic.

Any of the following signs should cause concern:

- dullness – most commonly the first sign
- lying down and isolating itself from friends
- lack of appetite or refusing to eat
- rolling and pawing at the ground (rare in donkeys, if seen indicates very serious problem)
- fast breathing, rapid heart rate
- excessive sweating
- colour of gums or inside eyelid – brick red or very pale membranes are both very poor signs
- dry or tacky gums
- lack of or a reduction in the normal quantity of droppings.

Monitor daily for early signs:

- Check for any changes in behaviour.
- Check for changes in appetite.
- Check for a change in dung; consistency and number of piles passed daily. Persistently very loose or very dry droppings could be indicative of colic particularly if other symptoms appear.
- Check the donkey's breathing pattern and for any signs of respiratory distress.

TREATMENT FOR COLIC

If you see these signs or suspect that your donkey is unwell, call your vet immediately.

Do not attempt to treat the donkey yourself or give it a feed or any drugs. Treatment depends on the cause diagnosed by the vet. Your vet will probably carry out the following:

- check the heart rate and temperature
- listen to the abdomen with a stethoscope to check the gut sounds
- check the teeth
- take a blood sample
- perform a rectal examination (a painless and vital procedure)
- pass a stomach (nasogastric) tube to check for reflux.

Depending on the findings your vet may introduce fluids into your donkey's stomach via a tube that is inserted up one nostril. It may be necessary to put the donkey onto a 'drip' (fluid introduction via the large vein in the neck). Pain killers will probably be prescribed. Hospitalisation may be indicated and some cases may require surgery. Surgery carries a high risk in most cases of colic and involves considerable nursing care and cost. It will require prompt transport to a hospital. Check you are insured for the costs and discuss the chances of success with your vet. Euthanasia may also be the kindest option in serious cases.

About a third of our colic cases also have hyperlipaemia on presentation due to lack of appetite. If this is not treated together with the colic prognosis is not good. Donkeys with impaction colic should never be starved or have food withheld for as long as is common with horses.

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF COLIC

MANAGEMENT FOR PREVENTION OF COLIC

Feed: sudden changes to diet, poor quality feed, too much grass, feeding cereals

Make any dietary changes gradually over 2 - 4 weeks. Feed good quality forage and donkey specific proprietary feeds. Avoid mouldy feed.

Always soak sugar beet to the manufacturer's recommendations.

Ensure regular feeding: little and often especially if the animal is on additional feed.

Avoid access to too much rich spring grass.

Inadequate/dirty water supply

Check troughs daily. Self-fill drinkers can become blocked, water supply can fail.

Clean any contaminated water containers as donkeys won't drink dirty water.

Check water is not frozen or too cold. Many donkeys won't drink very cold water – warm the water in cold weather.

Consider offering several sources of water.

Eating non-food items such as plastic bags, rope, bedding

Ensure your donkey cannot access such material.

Consider changing the bedding to something less palatable, such as wood shavings. Cardboard or paper bedding is not recommended for donkeys.

Ingestion of poisonous plants

Know your poisonous plants and trees!

Check pasture and boundary fences and hedgerows frequently and remove them or fence off the problem area.

Fence off trees during fruiting to prevent gorging.

Sandy soil

Avoid grazing on sandy soil pasture if possible.

Dental disease – failure to chew food adequately resulting in a blockage of the gut

Ensure your donkey's teeth are checked at least annually by a qualified Equine Dental Technician or your veterinary surgeon.

Dental disease is more common in older donkeys. Suspect teeth problems if donkeys are "quidding" (dropping part chewed feed) or drooling saliva.

Worms – parasites causing an obstruction

Ensure regular faecal worm egg counts (FWECS) are carried out to determine if your donkey requires treating for worms. Consult your vet for advice.

Pick up manure from the paddock a minimum of twice per week.

Stomach ulcers

Reduce stress and ensure you 'trickle feed' your donkey.