



## FACTSHEET: OWNERS

# COLIC IN DONKEYS

*Colic can be extremely serious and early treatment is vital. Make sure you know the causes and signs so you can act quickly if your donkey becomes ill.*

### What is colic?

Colic is a symptom of abdominal pain, commonly in the gastrointestinal tract (such as the stomach or intestine). It can also be due to pain in other organs, such as the kidneys, ovaries or bladder.

There are many different kinds of colic, including:

- impaction or blockage of the intestine with partly digested food, foreign bodies (such as plastic bags), or parasites (worms)
- muscle spasms in the wall of the intestine (spasmodic colic)
- build-up of gas (gassy colic)
- torsion (twisting) of part of the intestine (twisted gut)
- painful conditions, such as stomach ulcers, tumours, or pancreatitis.

### What causes colic and how can it be prevented?



**Severe colic can be fatal. Prevention is always better than cure.**

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF COLIC	PREVENTION
Feed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sudden changes to diet.</li><li>• Poor-quality feed.</li><li>• Too much grass.</li><li>• Feeding cereals.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make changes to your donkey's diet gradually over 2-4 weeks.</li><li>• Feed good-quality forage and donkey-specific feeds.</li><li>• Avoid mouldy feed.</li><li>• Always soak sugar beet to the manufacturer's recommendations.</li><li>• Feed little and often, especially if your donkey has additional feed.</li><li>• Do not allow your donkey access to too much rich spring grass.</li></ul> <p><i>See factsheet Feeding donkeys for more information.</i></p>
Inadequate or dirty water supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Check troughs daily. Self-filling drinkers can become blocked or water supply can fail.</li><li>• Clean dirty water containers. Donkeys will not drink dirty water.</li><li>• Check water is not frozen or too cold. Warm the water in cold weather. Many donkeys will not drink very cold water.</li><li>• Offer several sources of water.</li></ul>

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POSSIBLE CAUSES OF COLIC	PREVENTION
Eating non-food items (such as plastic bags, rope, bedding)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure your donkey cannot access non-food items.</li> <li>• Change your donkey's bedding to something less palatable (such as wood shavings).</li> <li>• Do not use cardboard or paper bedding.</li> </ul>
Eating poisonous plants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know your poisonous plants and trees.</li> <li>• Check pasture, boundary fences, and hedgerows frequently.</li> <li>• Remove poisonous plants or fence off the problem area.</li> <li>• Fence off trees when fruiting to prevent your donkey gorging.</li> </ul> <p><i>See factsheet Poisonous plants and trees for more information.</i></p>
Sandy soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid grazing your donkey on sandy soil pasture if possible.</li> </ul>
Dental disease: failure to chew food adequately resulting in blockage of the gut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have your donkey's teeth checked at least annually by a qualified equine dental technician or vet.</li> <li>• Dental disease is more common in older donkeys.</li> <li>• Suspect dental problems if your donkey is 'quidding' (dropping partially chewed feed) or drooling saliva.</li> </ul> <p><i>See factsheet Donkey dental care for more information.</i></p>
Parasites: worms causing obstruction or inflammation of the gut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange regular faecal worm egg counts to check if your donkey needs treating for worms.</li> <li>• Speak to your vet for advice.</li> <li>• Clear droppings from your donkey's paddock at least twice a week.</li> </ul> <p><i>See factsheet Responsible worm control – a guide for owners for more information.</i></p>
Stomach ulcers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep stress to a minimum.</li> <li>• 'Trickle feed' your donkey.</li> </ul>
Pain: any painful condition can lead to colic, including severe lameness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure your donkey has adequate pain relief if they have a painful condition.</li> </ul>

## What are the signs of colic?

### **ALERT**

Call your vet immediately if you suspect your donkey is unwell. A dull donkey is a veterinary emergency.

Due to their stoic nature, donkeys usually show less dramatic signs of colic than those seen in horses. A donkey with colic may simply become dull and unwilling to eat. However, less dramatic signs do not mean the donkey is in less pain.

### **SIGNS OF COLIC MAY INCLUDE:**

- dullness
- lying down
- lack of appetite or refusing to eat
- weight shifting, usually between the hind legs
- rolling and pawing at the ground (rare in donkeys, can indicate a serious problem)
- fast breathing, rapid heart rate
- sweating
- brick red or pale gums or insides of eyelids
- dry or tacky gums
- lack of, or reduction in, the normal quantity of droppings
- self isolating, moving away from companions.



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Monitor your donkey for early signs of colic. Check daily for changes in:

- behaviour
- appetite
- dung consistency
- number of droppings passed daily
- breathing.

Your vet may carry out the following to try to diagnose the type of colic:

- check your donkey's heart rate and temperature
- listen to your donkey's abdomen with a stethoscope to check the gut sounds
- check your donkey's teeth
- take a blood sample
- perform a rectal examination
- pass a stomach (nasogastric) tube to check for reflux (backed up food or fluid).

### How is colic treated?

**Colic must be treated by a vet, do not try to treat it yourself.**

- If you suspect colic, call your vet at once and follow their advice.
- Do not starve your donkey or withhold food for long periods. This can lead to hyperlipaemia, a potentially fatal condition. See *factsheet Hyperlipaemia in donkeys for more information*.
- Your vet will decide the best treatment based on your donkey's diagnosis.
- Your vet will be likely to give painkillers.
- Depending on their findings, your vet may:
  - give your donkey fluids via a nasogastric tube
  - put your donkey on a 'drip' to give them fluid, usually via the large vein in their neck.

It may take multiple visits from your vet to treat your donkeys colic.

- Your donkey may need to be hospitalised if their case is severe. If your donkey is hospitalised, their companion must go too. Hospitalisation can be very stressful for donkeys.
- Some types of colic need surgery to resolve them. This will require prompt transport to a hospital. Surgery carries a high risk in most colic cases and involves considerable nursing care and cost. Check you are insured for the costs and talk to your vet about the chances of success.
- Euthanasia may be the kindest option if your donkey's case is serious. See *factsheet Euthanasia and dealing with death for more information*.

#### ALERT

It is common for donkey's with colic to develop hyperlipaemia due to lack of appetite. Early recognition and treatment of colic is vital.