

## **HORSE COLIC**

The term colic is applied loosely to almost all diseases of the organs of the abdomen that are accompanied by pain.

If the horse evinces abdominal pain, he is likely to be put down as suffering with colic, no matter whether the difficulty is a cramp of the bowel, an internal hernia, overloading of the stomach, or a painful disease of the bladder or liver.

Since these conditions differ so much in their causation and their nature, it is manifestly absurd to treat them alike and to expect the same drugs or procedures to relieve them all. Therefore it is important that the various diseased states that are so roughly classed together as colic shall, so far as possible, be separated and individualized in order that appropriate treatments can be prescribed.

With this object in view, colics will be considered under the following headings: Engorgement colic, obstruction colic, tympanitic colic, spasmodic colic, worm colic.

The general symptoms of abdominal pain, and therefore of colic, are restlessness, lying down, looking around toward the flank, kicking with the hind feet upward and forward toward the belly, jerky switching of the tail, stretching as though to urinate, frequent change of position, and groaning.

In the more intense forms the horse plunges about, throws himself down, rolls, assumes unnatural positions, as sitting on the haunches, and grunts loudly. Usually the pain is not constant, and during the intermissions the horse may eat and appear normal. During the period of pain sweat is poured out freely.

Sometimes the horse moves constantly in a circle. The respirations are accelerated, and usually there is no fever.

### **ENGORGEMENT COLIC**

This form of colic consists in an overloading of the stomach with food. The horse may have been overfed or the food may have collected in the stomach through failure of this organ to digest it and pass it backward into the intestines. Even a normal amount of food that the horse is unaccustomed to may cause disease. Hence a sudden change of food may produce engorgement colic.

Continued full rations while the horse is resting for a day or two or working too soon after feeding may serve as a cause. New oats, corn, or hay, damaged food, or food difficult of digestion, such as barley or beans, may incite engorgement colic. This disease may result from having fed the horse twice by error or from its having escaped and taken an unrestricted meal from the grain bin. Ground feeds that pack together making a sort of dough may cause engorgement colic if they are not mixed, with cut hay. Greedy eaters are predisposed to this

disease.

***Colic Symptoms*** - The horse shows the general signs of abdominal pain, which may be long continued or of short duration. Retching or vomiting movements are made; these are shown by labored breathing, upturned upper lip, contraction of the flank, active motion at the throat, and drawing in of the nose toward the breast, causing high arching of the neck. The horse may assume a sitting position on his haunches, like a dog. At times the pain is very great and the horse makes the most violent movements, as though mad.

At other times there is profound mental depression, the horse standing in a sleepy, or dazed, way, with the head down, the eyes closed, and leaning his head against the manger or wall. There is, during the struggles, profuse perspiration. Following retching, gas may escape from the mouth, and this may be followed by a sour froth and some stomach contents. The horse can not vomit except when the stomach is violently stretched, and, if the accumulation of food or gas is great enough to stretch the stomach so that vomiting is possible, it may be great enough to rupture this organ. So it happens not infrequently that a horse will die from ruptured stomach after vomiting. But after the stomach ruptures vomiting is impossible.

### **OBSTRUCTION COLIC**

The stomach or bowels may be obstructed by accumulations of partly digested food, by foreign bodies, by displacements, by paralysis, or by abnormal growths.

***Impaction of the Large Intestines.*** - This is a common bowel trouble and one which, if often not promptly recognized. It is caused by overfeeding, especially of bulky food containing an excess of indigestible residue; old, dry, hard hay, or stalks when largely fed; deficiency of secretions of the intestinal tracts; lack of water; want of exercise, medicines, etc.

***Symptoms.*** - Impaction of the large bowels is to be diagnosed by a slight abdominal pain, which may disappear for a day or two to reappear with more violence. The feces are passed somewhat more frequently, but in smaller quantities and more dry; the abdomen is full, but not distended with gas; the horse at first is noticed to paw and soon begins to look back at his sides.

Probably one of the most characteristic symptoms is the position assumed when down. He lies flat on his side, head and legs extended, occasionally raising his head to look toward his flank; he remains on his side from five to fifteen minutes at a time.

Evidently this position is the one giving the most freedom from pain. The horse rises at times, walks about the stall, paws, looks at his sides, backs up against the stall, which he presses with his tail, and soon lies down again, assuming his favored position.

The intestinal sounds, as heard by, applying the ear to the flank, are diminished, or there is no sound, indicating absence of motion of the bowels. The bowels may cease entirely to move. The pressure of the distended intestine upon the bladder may cause the horse to make

frequent attempts to urinate. The pulse is but little changed at first, being full and sluggish; later, if this condition is not overcome, it becomes rapid and feeble.

Horses may suffer from impaction of the bowels for a week, yet eventually recover, and cases extending two or even three weeks have ended favorably. More often, however, they seldom last over four or five days, many, in fact, dying sooner than this.

### **FLATULENT COLIC (TYMPANITIC COLIC, WIND COLIC OR BLOAT)**

Among the most frequent causes of this form of colic are to be mentioned sudden changes of food, too long fasting, food then given while the animal is exhausted, new hay or grain, large quantities of green food, food that has lain in the manger for some time and become sour, indigestible food, irregular teeth, crib-biting, and, in fact, anything that produces indigestion may produce flatulent colic.

The symptoms of wind colic are not so suddenly developed not so severe as those of cramp colic. At first the horse is noticed to be dull, paws slightly, and may or may not lie down. The pains from the start are continuous. The bellies enlarge, and by striking it in front of the haunches drumlike sound results. If not soon relieved the above symptoms are aggravated, and in addition there are noticed difficult breathing, bloodshot eyes, and red mucous membranes, loud tumultuous heart beat, profuse perspiration, trembling of front legs, sighing respiration, staggering from side to side, and, finally, plunging forward dead. The diagnostic symptoms of flatulent colic are the distention of the bowels with gas, detected by the bloated appearance and resonance on percussion.

### **SPASMODIC, OR CRAMP, COLIC**

This is the name given to that form of colic produced by contraction, or spasm, of a portion of the small intestines: It is produced by indigestible food; large drinks of cold water when the animal is warm; driving a heated horse through deep streams; cold rains; drafts of cold air, etc, Unequal distribution of or interference with the nervous supply here produces cramp of the bowels, the same as external cramps are produced. Spasmodic colic is much more frequently met with in highbred, nervous horses than in coarse, lymphatic ones.

*Symptoms.* - These should be carefully studied in order to diagnose this from other forms of colic requiring quite different treatment. Spasmodic colic always begins suddenly. If feeding, the horse is seen to stop abruptly, stamp impatiently, and probably look back. He soon evinces more acute pain, and this is shown by pawing, suddenly lying down, rolling, and getting up. During the period of pain the intestinal sounds, as heard by applying the ear over the flank, are louder than in health. There is then an interval of ease; he will resume feeding and appear to be entirely well.

In a little while, however, the pains return and are increased in severity, only to again pass off for a time. As the attack progresses these intervals of ease become shorter and shorter, and pain may be continuous. Animals suffering from this form of colic evince the most intense pain; they throw themselves down, roll over and over, jump up, whirl about, drop down

again, paw, or strike rather, with the front feet, steam and sweat, and make frequent attempts to pass their urine. Only a small amount of water is passed at a time, and this is due to the bladder being so frequently emptied. These attempts to urinate are often regarded by horsemen as symptoms of trouble of the kidneys or bladder.

In reality they are only one of the many ways in which the horse expresses the presence of pain. As a matter of fact, diseases of the bladder or kidneys of the horse are exceedingly rare. To recapitulate the symptoms of spasmodic colic: Keep in mind the history of the case, the type of horse, the suddenness of the attack, the increased intestinal sounds, the intervals of ease, the violent pain, the normal temperature and pulse during the intervals of ease, the frequent attempts to urinate, etc., and there is but little danger of confounding this with other forms of colic.

### **WORM COLIC**

Parasites of many kinds reside in the intestinal canal of horses. There are three kinds of tapeworms, one long roundworm, and several kinds of smaller roundworms. Besides these are the bot-fly grubs.

The intestinal worm most commonly seen is the long roundworm, known as *Ascaris equorum*. They are white or reddish in color and measure from 4 to 12 inches length. In thickness they vary from the size of a rye straw to that of a lady's little finger, being thickest at the middle and tapering at both ends. They are found singly or in groups or masses, and infest chiefly the small intestines.

***Worm Colic Symptoms.*** - Symptoms of intestinal worms are not always observed, even when many parasites are present. If the infestation is extreme, there may be slight colicky pains at times, or there may only be switching of the tail, frequent passages of manure, and some slight straining, itching of the anus, and rubbing of the tail or rump against the stall or fences; the horse is in poor condition; does not shed his coat; is hidebound and potbellied; the appetite is depraved, licking the walls, biting the wooden work of the stalls, licking parts of his body, eating earth, and being particularly fond of salt; the bowels are irregular, constipation or diarrhea being noticed.

Some place much dependence upon the symptom of itching of the upper lip, as shown by the horse frequently turning it up and rubbing it upon the wall or stalls. Others again declare that whenever we see the adherence of a dried whitish substance about the anus, worms are present.

The one symptom, however, that we should always look for, and certainly the only one that may not deceive us, is seeing the worms or their eggs (by the use of a microscope) in the dung.