

## Donkey: Colic

The term 'colic' describes the symptoms displayed when a horse or donkey is suffering from abdominal pain. Donkeys are very stoical by nature and therefore rarely display the same clinical signs as horses; instead they tend to present as dull and off their feed. Monitoring a donkey's demeanour and normal bowel habits can be helpful in identifying those affected before the condition deteriorates.

The causes of colic in donkeys are very varied and commonly include blockage with partially digested food material (impaction), muscle cramps of bowel wall (spasmodic) or a build of gas within the bowel. Investigation of colic is aimed at identifying the patient's physical status and the cause of the colic so that medical or surgical treatment can be tailored accordingly.



### Clinical signs

Donkeys are very stoical and therefore do not show the obvious clinical signs seen in horses e.g. rolling, pawing and stretching. Close monitoring of your donkey's demeanour and bowel habits can be very helpful in identifying when they become unwell. The earlier any changes are identified, the sooner the donkey can be examined and treatment administered.

Signs that may be seen include:

- dull, quiet in self
- reduced appetite or complete refusal of feed
- increased breathing and/or heart rate
- sweating
- rolling or pawing the ground (indicates a very serious problem)
- reddened gums
- reduced quantity of dung passed
- changes in the consistency of the dung e.g. very dry balls or diarrhoea.



**SIGNS OF COLIC IN DONKEYS CAN BE SUBTLE -DULLNESS AND REDUCED APPETITE**

### DIAGNOSIS

Veterinary examination may involve some or all of the following:

- measurement of the heart and respiratory rates;
- listening to the abdomen to check bowel motility;
- checking the temperature;
- internal (rectal) examination to help identify impactions, displaced or twisted bowel;
- passing a stomach tube via the nostril;
- sampling of fluid within the abdomen;
- blood sample analysis.

### KEY POINTS

- If you are in any doubt about your donkey **CALL YOUR VET.**
- Donkeys with colic tend to present as 'dull and off their feed'.
- Knowing your donkey's usual demeanour and bowel habits is essential to identifying when they are unwell.
- Colic can be expensive and difficult to treat; sometimes euthanasia is the kindest and most humane option.
- There are some preventative measures that can be taken to help avoid colic (see over).

### Treatment

Do not give any treatment to your donkey until it has been examined by your vet. The results of the examination will determine which treatments are appropriate, depending on the cause and severity of the colic. These may include:

- pain relieving medicines;
- medicines to reduce muscle spasms of the bowel wall;
- fluids delivered by a tube into the stomach;
- antibiotics are occasionally required;
- intra-venous fluids - 'going on a drip'.
- hospitalisation may be required in more serious cases or those requiring more intensive treatment;
- colic surgery is indicated in a small percentage of colic cases;
- euthanasia may be the kindest option in serious or advanced cases of colic.

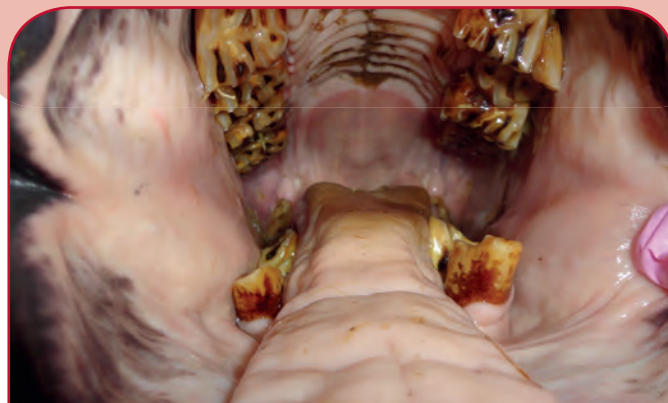


**SERIOUS CASES MAY REQUIRE HOSPITALISATION AND INTENSIVE TREATMENT**

### PREVENTION

Colic can be caused by very serious and sometimes fatal conditions and therefore prevention is most definitely better than cure.

- Make all changes to feeding regimes gradually over a period of 2-4 weeks.
- Do not allow your donkey to overfeed on lush spring grass.
- Ensure a clean water supply is always available.
- Ensure your donkey's teeth are examined at least annually by your vet.
- Discuss your worming strategy with your vet and try to collect droppings from your pastures at least twice weekly (poo pick).
- Avoid the use of cardboard or paper bedding. Straw bedding works best but shavings can be used as an alternative.
- Check your premises (including hedges) for poisonous trees and plants.



**ENSURE YOUR DONKEY'S TEETH ARE EXAMINED AT LEAST ONCE ANNUALLY BY YOUR VET**

Many XLEquine practices regularly liaise with The Donkey Sanctuary with regard to treatment and management of donkeys. XLEquine would like to acknowledge the work they do to transform the quality of life of donkeys in the UK and abroad. The Donkey Sanctuary is a charity that will never turn away from a donkey in need. They rely on donations to continue providing for donkeys and mules worldwide.

[www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk](http://www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk)



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