

## Treating colic in horses using homeopathy by Dr. John Fudens HMC DVM PH

Colic is a very real and common problem among horses. Many thousands of horses are afflicted with this disorder in the US every year. So what is colic actually? It is all kinds of gastro intestinal disorders containing the following characteristics. Spasms of pain. Sweating from the pain. Excessive gas production leading to enlargement of the intestines and abdomen resulting in what is called bloat. Inhibited or a lack of peristalsis which is movement of the digestive tract moving food residue along to be eliminated as feces.

There are many causes of colic in the horse. Their digestive system is vastly different from other mammals. It is a hybrid between animals like the dog, cat or pig and herbivores like cattle, sheep, goats. Horses have an esophagus, stomach and small intestines like dogs, cats and swine. But they also have the cecum, large and small colon like cow, sheep, goat.

The mouth, esophagus, stomach and small intestine are like those mammals listed above. Those organs are involved with taking in food, breaking down the food via enzymes, acids and peristaltic actions. Absorption of the nutrients starts in the small intestine. Now the cecum, large and small colon are like the cow and other ruminants. This is where the breaking down of plant material, microbial digestion and the main absorption of nutrients occurs. One could consider the cecum the fermentation microbial vat of the horse.

This hybrid digestive system is part of the problem of why horses colic more than other animals. They are not like other animals in many respects which horse owners know even without knowing the specifics. Any material being eaten by the horse is not handled the way it is in other mammals. So anything that is toxic or harmful can be more readily absorbed leading to problems. So what are the possible causes of colic in horses.

### Diet.

Horses like all herbivores are plant grazers. If given free access to large fields/pastures they will move about and eat selected plant material that they know is good for them, they like the taste of and I am sure other factors which us humans do not always understand. Think the wild mustangs. Now most horse owners do not have hundreds/thousands of acres of pasture for their horse(s) to graze on. Plus our horses being domesticated for many generations have lost some of the genetic makeup of mustangs. Mustangs graze on scrub/sparse land for the most part. So they have adapted to that type of vegetation. Domestic horses are better taken care of (?). Even if we have some land for them to graze on we supplement that with hay. This hay has different types of grasses, can be imported from various parts of the country and even if

grown locally is from land that has been usually cultivated and chemicalized to grow the grass for profit. This hay can have different molds/fungus on it. Next we give them various types of grains and treats with all sort of additives like molasses and other ingredients. Yes I know they love and will eat apples, carrots, watermelon, pears, etc.. But those items are treats in addition to the basic way of feeding them. In our lives horses like all domestic animals are totally dependent on us for their food and water.

## Sand

Impaction with sand/ground material occurs regularly when they are kept on ground where the vegetation is sparse. So what happens is this. Instead of chewing off the tops of the grass material they will pull up roots with the tops and then ingest any dirt/sand particles connected to the roots. After a while that material accumulates in the cecum and colon resulting in impactions.

## Teeth.

When they have points on the molars and the teeth need floating or through old age the teeth are worn down almost to the gum line this will interfere with mastication of food. This then causes the digestive tract to malfunction.

## Worms.

Horses will get parasite colic when they have intestinal worms. The main culprit is strongyles in the arteries of the intestines mainly the mesenteric artery. This causes an arteritis or inflammation of the artery lining or even an aneurysm of the artery. This situation will obviously cause a malfunction of the digestive tract.

So how is colic treated. Well conventional medicine brings out the drug Banamine. This drug is potent non-narcotic, nonsteroidal, analgesic agent with anti-inflammatory and antipyretic (fever) activity. Yes when the horse is in pain it is important to relieve the pain. You will see them kick at the abdomen and act nervous of sorts. They can sweat, want to lay down and roll, the eyes and face have a look that says they hurt. But unfortunately there is in life cause and effect. Pain tells us something is wrong and we need to find out what and correct the cause. Plus the drug relaxes body tissue and we want to get the intestines moving again which this drug works against. Now all horse people know or should know to walk the horse. This helps stimulate peristalsis and certainly keeps the horse from rolling. If they roll the chances of twisting the intestines increases dramatically.

We need to give mineral oil even if there is no hard evidence of sand/dirt impaction. This can be determined to some extent by doing a rectal exam. Why? In colic there is little to no peristalsis so the food stagnates. The horse is usually not drinking at all so

the ingest gets dry. This compounds the impaction further. We give the oil being careful not to put any down the trachea causing an inhalation pneumonia which is a serious problem. The oil has no taste per say. Now if we tube the horse to get the oil into the stomach then no problem. Assuming we are careful not to cause a nose bleed with the tube. But using a drenching syringe we have to let the horse swallow the oil. So we have to be careful. I am not talking about giving several oz's. here. A minimum of 1-2 quarts if not up to a gallon which we have done at the sanctuary. Cannot overdose and one really wants to drench the intestinal tract with the oil to soften the ingest. Besides acting as a lubricant the oil tends to stimulate peristalsis. This for the most part is all conventional medicine can do. If the horse twists the gut and the owner has thousands of \$ and a nearby vet college hospital surgical repair can be attempted. Otherwise the horse will die.

Now what I do with all the horses I have treated for colic? #1 Is walking them without fail. To the point both horse and human get tired. Have to keep them from rolling. #2 do a rectal if signs point to a sand impaction. I have done these even when I was sure there was none. The act of putting on a glove, lubricating it and going into the rectum/colon tends to stimulate peristalsis. Plus I remove feces I can reach easily. #3 My go to homeopathic remedy is Colocynthis. This is an energy extraction of bitter apple. It is not bitter apple but the energy of that substance. Every horse I have treated with colic I start with this remedy. To date I have not had to use other remedies like Nux Vomica (top remedy for drug, chemical, alcohol detox), Magnesia Phosphorica (nice remedy for colic in babies/children and for menstrual cramps in women) or other remedies for colic.

Now there is an art plus the science of using homoeopathy in my view. So I start with Colocynthis 200 c 3 pellets each dose. As I have said before I always use 3 pellets for horses. How often I repeat the remedy and what else I do besides walking depends on the horse and how it is acting. I also listen for gut sounds mainly on the right side where the cecum lays but watch the horse and how it acts. Restless, wants to lay down, eyes, sweating, overall demeanor. So I can and will repeat the remedy every 1-2 hours and even more frequently if necessary. Every horse has responded nicely with 1-2 doses or out to 5-6 doses spread over time. They get no food for 12-24 hours. Water as needed. When I get my gut sounds 70% improved and they start passing manure then I stop the remedy/walking and let them stay in the stall until I am sure they can eat and resume regular activity. I will only give them straight hay for several days before they get any grain.

I realize this article is a long read but this issue in horses is very important for them and their owners. Hope it is informative.

