

Horse Trails and Tales

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Easy Tips

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Impaction Colic

- Inactive horses are at risk, especially following surgery or stall rest.
- Use the pain scale to assess the level of pain.
- Do a rectal exam for early screening if:
 - The pain level is suspicious
 - The heart rate is over 48
 - Low manure volume

Sneak Peek – Impaction Colic

As mentioned last week, The Horse's Mouth e-zine

<http://www.drkellon.com/thehorsesmouth.html>

will include a monthly feature on veterinary research. I scan articles, newsletters, etc. weekly looking for studies that have practical impact for horse owners. That can be an exercise in frustration many times, but every now and then something comes along that is really useful.

This article in the Vet Learn Compendium: Continuing Education for Veterinarians is a good example.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/assets.prod.vetlearn.com/0e/7d0540a7d211e087120050568d3693/file/PV0711_Blikslager_TIP.pdf>

It focuses on impactions of the cecum, the first part of the large intestine, but it applies to colic/pain in general and is particularly relevant to impactions. The Behavioral Pain Scoring System on page 2, Table I is excellent. It's an easy to do, objective way to grade pain that is not related to the pawing or rolling we typically associate with colic. It would be a great thing to print, laminate and hang in your barn!

The article also reminds us of other useful facts, such as it is never normal for a horse to have less than 3 bowel movements a day.

*Seeing manure is no guarantee
there is no impaction.*

As impactions are developing, it is common for the horse to continue to pass manure since there is manure already present in the digestive tract in areas behind the impaction. Therefore, seeing manure is no guarantee there is no impaction. It is also important to monitor the amount passed and frequency of movements.

Pain and inactivity can contribute to changes in the motility of the bowel that may predispose to impactions. Horses recovering from surgery, or on stall rest for serious injuries, are at risk. The article

recommends making sure pain control is optimized to eliminate the potential effect of pain on gut motility. At the same time, it recognizes that pain control could mask some signs of impending impaction/colic.

The bottom line suggestion was to use the pain scale to score all high risk horses on a daily basis. If pain score is suspicious and heart rate over 48 or manure volume low, do a rectal exam to screen for early problems. Sound advice.

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