

## Points on Pets: New horse-owner a bit skittish

by R.G.\_Elmor\_DVM

**Q:** Since our family has just become first-time horse owners, we are very concerned about how to care for our new family member. Although we have read everything that we can about the care of our horse, we still have jitters. We are concerned about our horse getting colic because all that we have read indicates that this is a common problem. Our reading also indicates that this is a serious ailment requiring immediate veterinary care. How can we prevent colic in our horse?

**A:** As you are rapidly learning, owning a horse can be pleasurable and stressful, particularly for inexperienced owners. To help reduce your anxiety about caring for your new horse, you should ask your local veterinarian to conduct a complete physical examination of your new family member and advise you regarding a complete health care program including the prevention of both internal and external parasites, vaccinations, exercise, and proper nutrition. Having a well-planned health care program to follow and having a good relationship with your veterinarian will help ease any worries you might have about what to do when problems occur. Knowing that veterinary care is always available will also help reduce your anxiety level.

Although most people refer to colic as if it were a specific disease, the word really refers to any intense abdominal pain or discomfort. Therefore, colic is not a specific disease, but a sign seen in many diseases. Most horse experts divide the causes of colic into four major categories: enteritis or inflammation of the intestines, obstruction or blockage of the digestive tract, strangulation of the gut, and lack of blood supply to the digestive tract.

Infections within the intestinal tract cause enteritis, which causes damage to the inner lining of the intestines and allows toxins to pass into the horse's blood. This can make the horse very sick and often results in death. Obstruction or blockage of the intestines is most often caused by ingestion of abnormal objects. Strangulation occurs whenever the intestines fall through holes in the supporting tissues within the abdomen or when the intestines twist on themselves. Colic can also occur whenever the intestines do not receive an adequate supply of oxygen or nutrition because of narrowing of abdominal blood vessels.

Although it is unlikely that you can totally prevent colic during an entire lifetime, excellent management can reduce the incidence. Of course, working closely with your veterinarian will greatly reduce the occurrence of health problems in your horse.

**Q:** Will having our tomcat neutered stop his fighting with other cats? He has had several injuries due to fighting within the last several weeks. Some of these wounds have become infected and have oozed pus. Right now he is a mess.

**A:** Although it is uncertain, neutering tomcats reduces their tendency to fight with other cats. This in turn reduces the number of bites and scratches, which reduces the occurrence of infections and abscesses.

Neutering tomcats is a routine surgery with a low probability of complications. Most tomcats recover quickly and completely following this surgery. If you do not want your tomcat to sire kittens, you should have him neutered as soon as possible. This will make your tomcat a better citizen and will decrease the number of unwanted cats in your area. Your veterinarian can give you additional advice regarding your particular cat

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