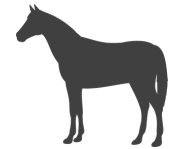


<https://www.deuka.de/en/current/colic-in-horses/>

Special features of feeding horses with gastrointestinal problems



HOW DO I PREVENT COLIC IN MY HORSE IN WINTER?

The daily routine of many horses is different in the winter months than during the period between April and October. They have less or no grazing and spend more time in their stalls. In addition, their coats are long or shorn and the few hours of sunshine have a tiring effect on body and mind. The new daily routine between rain and snow is often not only dreary, but can also promote colic. If horse owners notice changes in their animal, they should be vigilant. After all, colic can sometimes be life-threatening. Here you can find out what you can do to prevent gastrointestinal problems in your horse. However, if you notice the first signs - or are unsure - consult a veterinarian directly.

Among horse owners, the term "colic" (Latin *colicus*) is usually used synonymously with general discomfort or pain in the horse's abdomen. Both can be caused by many different factors. Depending on the place of origin, colic is divided into different groups.

The different types of colic

Constipation colic in the large intestine

The horse's intestinal contents become too solid due to lack of fluid and the animal can no longer excrete them. There are many reasons for the lack of fluid: Too little water intake, too much straw or poorly chewed feed are the most common reasons.

Small intestine constipation colic

Here, the origin of the constipation lies further forward in the intestine. Tumours or mesenteries on the intestinal wall can be the triggers. But a heavy infestation with parasitic worms can also trigger constipation in the small intestine.

Sand colic

Sand colic is caused by deposits in the stomach and intestines (e.g. sand, stones) that lead to a twisting of

the colon that requires surgery.

Gas colic

Caused by flatulent feed (e.g. freshly mown grass, maize or potatoes). Gas colic is manifested by increased flatulence and externally by a mostly enlarged, "bloated" abdomen.

Seizure colic

Cramping colic is characterised by (strong) cramps, which are usually caused by feeding errors or stress. Parasite infestation (e.g. tapeworms) can also cause the cramps.

Stomach overload

A distinction is made between primary and secondary gastric overload. A primary overload is when the horse has eaten too much swelling and/or fermenting feed. Secondary overload is when saliva, feed residues and secretions back up into the stomach, e.g. due to an intestinal obstruction.

Intestinal obstruction

If the intestinal muscles no longer work or do not work sufficiently, the digestive tract contracts. In extreme cases, a complete and sometimes life-threatening intestinal obstruction can be the result.

Bowel obstruction

This is a rather rare form of colic. In this case, the intestine sifts through small gaps in the musculature or the abdominal cavity, gets stuck and can no longer return to its original position.



A horse with stomach problems lies in the snow (© Nadine Haase - stock.adobe.com)

Possible symptoms of colic

Since colic has different causes, the symptoms also vary from case to case. However, in practice, some signs of the disease occur particularly frequently. These are, for example:

- Restlessness
- Increased pawing
- Repeated bleating
- Head banging against the back or belly
- Frequent lying down, repeated rolling
- Eyes wide open
- Shock breathing
- Dry oral mucosa
- Sweating, cold sweat
- Refusal to take in water

Causes of colic and gastrointestinal problems in winter

The living conditions of horses in winter can favour some gastrointestinal disorders:

- During the long, dark days in the stalls, horses often get bored. To keep themselves busy, they may **eat more straw than usual**. The cereal stalks, which are rich in crude fibre, contain a lot of lignin. This stable plant component is difficult to digest. Lignin also binds a lot of water, which has a negative effect on digestion.
- Especially in winter, horses often drink **too little water**. Cold drinking water in particular is less likely to be touched. If the animal stands on paddocks without drinking water for a longer period of time, this also increases the water deficiency. Together with excessive straw intake, this lays the foundation for constipation colic.
- The **lack of exercise**, which can occur more quickly in winter than in spring or summer, works against healthy activity of the stomach and intestines. Finally, regular and continuous exercise promotes metabolism and digestion. If rides and pastures are omitted, the metabolism may slow down and intestinal activity decreases. Digestive disorders can then occur particularly easily.
- In winter, horses stand more often in the damp paddocks. Here they can pick up **small stones, sand and mud**. When they pull short blades of grass out of the sand, they always pick up sand as well. But also when splashing in the mud and drinking the muddy water, some dirt gets into the horse. If the dirt particles are then deposited in the stomach and intestines, they form the starting point of sand colic.

These 11 tips help prevent colic

1. Make sure you get enough exercise

Whether it's raining, storming or snowing: exercise is always good for you. Especially in winter, horse owners should provide additional exercise. This not only stimulates digestion, but also strengthens the immune system.

2. Provide sufficient water

In addition to reducing straw intake, sufficient fluid supply is important to keep digestion going. If horses do not touch the water in frosty temperatures, it makes sense to add warmed water. Checking the watering troughs is very important. Feeding mash (e.g. deukavallo apple mash) two to three times a week can also help to provide more fluid.

3. Provide enough hay

You should always offer your horses hay or haylage in sufficient quantity for free disposal. Always make sure that the quality is good.

4. Hay supplements against excessive straw intake

Fresh hay and haylage of good quality are the be-all and end-all of good digestion. If enough of this is available in good quality, this can also prevent the excessive consumption of straw in winter. If there is not enough hay available or if horse owners want to increase the amount, a hay supplement (e.g. deukavallo hay cobs) is suitable. The roughage portion should be ~1.5 kg per 100 kg body weight.

5. Do not exceed two kilos per meal

Especially for horses with sensitive stomachs, concentrated feed should be divided into several smaller meals. Several small portions are also easier to digest than a few large ones. Finally, it has proven effective to offer pellet feed (e.g. deukavallo Top E) at a certain distance after hay intake (approx. 15 minutes).

6. Rethinking feeding in paddocks

In wet and muddy paddocks, there is a risk that the four-legged friends will ingest sand, mud, stones or dirt with the hay or haylage. If the animals stay there for up to one hour, it is a good idea to refrain from feeding them. If the animals are to spend more than an hour in the paddocks, you should offer them the feed in hayracks. This way the feed will always remain clean. Make sure that the area around the hayrack is free of sand. If the hay rack is empty, the animals will also eat from the ground. Especially lower-ranking animals often have no other choice.

7. Flea and linseed against dirt in the feed

Psyllium and linseed have sand-binding properties. If it is not possible to prevent horses from ingesting sand, stones or dirt with feed or water, horse owners can get some of the sand out of the stomach and intestinal tract by feeding psyllium or linseed (e.g. [deukavallo Leinvital](#)).

8. Herbs have a vitalising effect

In addition, herbs in the feed can have a stimulating and vitalising effect. Horse feeds with appropriate herbal mixtures (e.g. [deukavallo herbal muesli](#)) are suitable here. In this way you stimulate the metabolism of your animals and support the development of a strong immune system. Some herbs also have antispasmodic and pain-relieving properties. Alternatively, you can add herbal tea directly to the drinking water or pour herbal tea on mash.

9. Mineral feeds replace fresh grasses and pasture plants in winter

Vitamins and minerals are especially important in the dark season. But right now, neither fresh grass nor pasture plants are sufficiently available. Moreover, due to the lack of sunshine, no vitamin D can be formed. Mineral feed (e.g. [deukavallo Mineral](#)) is particularly suitable for bridging the time until the grazing season.

10. Change the feeding only slowly

Abrupt changes in feeding can stress the stomach and intestines. If a change of feed is imminent, horse owners should take care to change to a new feed only slowly and in small steps.

11. Change bedding

If the horse eats straw excessively due to boredom, horse owners should think about changing the bedding. Alternatives are, for example, flax straw, wood shavings or straw chaff. Spreading approx. 0.5 kg of fresh straw per 100 kg of body weight is then sufficient.

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