



IMPACTION COLIC

IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE

1. IMPACTION COLIC
2. TESTIMONIAL

As an owner it's highly likely that at some point a horse under your care will experience colic.

Colic no matter the type is extremely worrying, especially when the cause is not always known. After a colic episode it is natural to look towards feeding and management to try and ensure it doesn't happen again. In this article we will focus on impaction colic.

What are the first steps to reducing the risk of impaction colic?

As long as there is no physical reason why the horse had an impaction colic, such as a tumor for example, common causes include poorly digested food, and dehydration.

Keeping the horse hydrated

Water is a vital part of any horse's diet but it's especially worth noting in horses that have experienced impaction colic previously. Some horses experience more impaction colic in the autumn /spring time when the temperatures in South Africa are not so hot and therefore they do not drink as much water. Therefore, it's important to monitor what is drunk and entice slow drinkers where possible. This can be done by flavoring the water with suitable fruit juices & adding salt to the diet.

Providing salt each day helps stimulate thirst and thus water consumption, and so it's important to ensure your horse gets enough salt each day. Many people allow free choice salt via the use of a salt block. This way of providing salt allows the horses to take more when needed, i.e. during times of exercise and during hotter weather. However not all horses use salt blocks well and others can overconsume.



So another way is to add additional salt to the diet. Although this may be provided in your feed it generally won't be enough to induce a thirst. The average 500kg horse must consume about 10g of sodium a day to meet the maintenance sodium requirements. Table salt (sodium chloride) is approximately 40% sodium. Therefore you would need to add 25g of table salt (which is roughly 2 tablespoons) each day while still allowing some access to a salt block, as well. If the weather is hotter, or the horse is exercising harder, then you can give additional salt or an electrolyte supplement. If your horse is not keen to eat his food with additional salt then you could try using an electrolyte instead, however try and use one that is added to feed and not water as this could put some horses off drinking. Always ensure that water is always easily accessible and is fresh and clean.

Soaking your Hay

One management change that can be implemented easily for horses prone to impaction colic, is the soaking of hay. Not only does it help to increase the water intake of the horse but it also helps to lubricate and soften the hay making it easier to chew properly, which can be beneficial for older horses who have difficulty chewing or for those that rush their hay.

Inadequately chewed hay can lead to a greater risk of impaction. Feeding softer, less stemmy hays can also be advantageous as they also tend to be more easily digestible. For horses prone to impaction ensuring they have maximum grazing time (even 24/7 turnout if possible) as grass can help in reducing impaction risk as fresh grass contains more water and easier to eat than hay.

Looking at hay alternatives

For horses with a high impaction risk, such as those having suffered multiple bouts of colic, feeding hay alternatives such as

hay cubes or/and sugar beet products might be a better option than long-stem hay. The reason for this is that once chewed the fibre length is much smaller in terms of particle size, which helps to reduce impaction colic. To enhance this further you could feed hay cubes soaked (note sugar beet products must always be soaked). Any concentrate feed provided can be soaked and fed as a mash as a way of increasing water intake.

Keep them moving

Quite often impaction colic's can occur as a subsequent issue for horses on box rest or those having longer periods of time off work. Movement aids equine digestion and therefore its vital to at least hand walk or lunge your horse if ridden work is not possible. Older horses and those in box rest can also be prone to impaction because they tend to want to move less due to joint pain or other illness and so discuss with your veterinarian how you could provide your older/sick horse with support for any discomfort in order for them to be at least hand walked and/or turned out for longer periods of time.

Establish a good gut health

In addition to the above changes, supporting forage digestion in the overall diet might be beneficial for impaction prone horses. Research shows supplemental equine specific yeast cultures can help improve nutritional utilization in the hindgut. This improvement in forage fermentation might help reduce the risk of hindgut impaction. Epol and Equus have both chosen to use the research based Alltech Yea-saac within our feeds. This product has been proven to assist in aiding fibre digestion.

Although colic can be an extremely stressful time, making small adjustments to your horse's management can drastically limit the horse's risk of a repeat impaction colic episode.

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