

Colic in the Boarded Horse

The boarded horse lives a different lifestyle than those who live at their owner's home or are turned out to pasture. These horses often live in stalls and may or may not have runs. They may spend their days inside and their only exercise may be an hour of riding or turnout time. Many horses are able to adapt to this lifestyle very well if they were raised in this manner as foals. Horses who have been turned out their whole life and then are put in a stall may not adjust so well. These horses may also have an increase chance in developing colic.

Colic is a broad term that generally means that the horse has a stomachache. The horse's digestive system is very unique in that their stomachs are unusually small for their size. The natural lifestyle of the horse has been changed drastically over the past one hundred years. Horses were designed by nature to stay in pasture and constantly graze throughout the day. Instead we have brought our horses in from the pastures and put them in stalls. We then continue to feed them the same amount of grain concentrate that they receive while they are working or not. We also provide them with a flake or two of hay. They receive their ration twice a day. Horses were not designed to eat these two large meals per day. Horses also do not have a sense of being full, which contributes to most colic cases where horses have broken into feed rooms. The boarded horse has been able to adjust to these large meals despite his small stomach, but many still have difficulties.

Boarded horses usually experience colic because of one or two reasons. The first is that the horse is having a hard time adjusting to his new stall life from one in a pasture. He is fed two large meals per day and this is shocking his system. He is unable to properly digest this large amount of feed in such a short time period when he is designed to eat small meals throughout the day. These large meals basically result in overloading his small stomach and killing the helpful bacteria that exist in his hindgut. The other reason for colic is that the horse has managed to break into a feed room or feed storage area. Because the horse is unable to have the feeling of "fullness," he will continue to eat the tasty sweet feed until he is very ill.

There are a few major signs of colic that one should look for in an ill horse. The horse may roll continuously. He will get up and get down and roll over and over. He will also look back or kick at his belly because it hurts. They may also result in a fever. Extreme cases of colic will also make a horse founder and he will appear to be sitting back on his hind feet. He will try not to put any pressure on his front feet because they are hot and hurting. These horses will need immediate medical attention. Severe cases of colic have resulted in the deaths of many horses. When you find a horse that is colicking, you should first alert a veterinarian. You will then need to catch the horse and keep him walking. Walking will keep the horses gut moving and keep him from rolling. Horses who roll viscously may be causing themselves more problems. Rolling will cause the intestines of the horse to twist and tangle. Many horses have been lost to twisted guts as they cause pressure build up from internal gases and eventually something will give.

There are generally two treatments for horses that do not require colic surgery. Horses will be given an injection of Banamine. If your barn has Banamine on hand, you can call your veterinarian and ask him if you can give this to your horse and how much. Banamine causes the smooth muscle in the stomach to calm and not contract. This will relieve much of the pain that the horse is feeling. The horse is usually injected and walked until the no longer attempt to lie down and roll. This procedure, however, may take hours and many people have been known to walk horses all night long. The second method is to use mineral oil down the horse's throat and into the gut. The oil will cause the horses system to flush out all of the built up concentrate that is causing the horse to colic. These horses may also be injected with Banamine and walked until the no longer show signs of colic.

To avoid colic in horses, horses should be allowed to have ample water that is clean and fresh. They should also be allowed to munch on hay all day if they are going to be stalled. Horses that receive two large meals per day should also be allowed hay during the day if possible. If possible, it is best that horses have their concentrate amount split up into four or five small meals per day, unfortunately many barns are not able to provide this service. Owners may choose to invest in automatic feeders that will dispense a small amount of feed at specific times. There are also automatic feeders for hay flakes. In pasture, horses should have plenty of short grass. Horses will tend to not eat tall grass and may starve themselves. If the grass is limited, owners should provide horses with round bales. Horses should also not be allowed to roam free in barns where the feed is readily stored unless they are locked with a padlock or combination locks. Many horses have found ways to unclip locks and break into feed containers. Horses should also receive ample exercise to insure that their bowels are moving properly.

As a responsible owner, it is common courtesy to notice any abnormal changes in fellow boarders horses as well as your own. If you see anything that is slightly odd or different you are better off alerting the barn manager and owners. The situation may turn out to be nothing, but you are better safe than sorry. Your horse will soon become a beloved part of your family and you will want to insure his safety and health at all times.