

Equine Newsletter

Avoiding Winter Colic



Central Ontario Veterinary Services

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Winter 2022

Marigold left some of her hay overnight on Thursday. She seemed fine otherwise, and was turned out with her two paddock mates and a bale of hay on Friday. On Saturday morning, she looked fine, but did not eat her grain. She hadn't taken any water overnight. She went out with her friends, but after lunch was found down, unwilling to rise, and occasionally rolled onto her side before sitting up on her chest again. An emergency call was placed to Central Ontario Veterinary Services, and the vet was quickly on the way.

Marigold showed many of the signs of low-grade discomfort associated with certain types of colic. Not all horses with colic roll and thrash violently, at least not in the initial stages. The physical examination was normal in all respects apart from reduced intestinal sounds in the mare's left flank. Marigold was sedated, and a careful examination of the hind part of the abdomen was made by rectal palpation. Impaction of the large colon was diagnosed. Fortunately, this type of colic responds well to medical treatment in most cases.

Colonic impaction is one of the most common "Winter Colics". Reduced water intake and, most importantly, reduced exercise level, are major causes of impactions. The rate of passage of material through the large intestine (the colon) slows, and water is absorbed out of the colonic contents into the body. Eventually, the manure becomes too hard and thick to pass through one of several narrow bends in the colon, such as the pelvic flexure. Pressure builds up ahead of the impaction, while intestinal contractions run up against the immovable mass, causing abdominal pain which we know as colic.

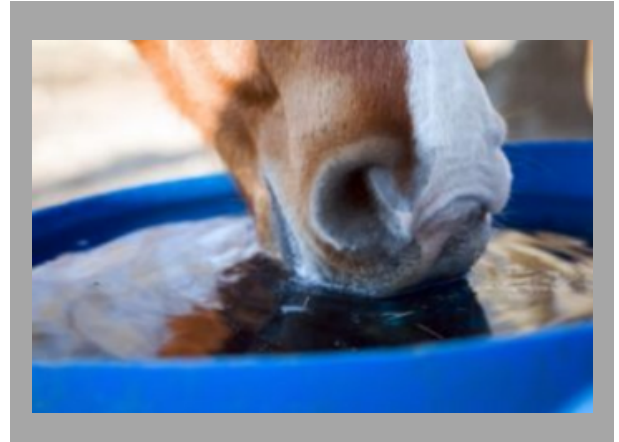
Our veterinarian on call treated Marigold with laxatives and analgesics for pain control, and she was held off feed overnight until she had passed four piles of gradually softening manure.



We advised Marigold's owners to keep her outside as much as possible, in a paddock where she has shelter from the wind. Horses who are clipped need to wear a blanket, but those in long coat keep themselves very warm with their natural insulation, as long as they can stay dry and get out of the wind.

Water should be offered outside, but many horses drink very little in cold conditions, leaving it to freeze quickly. Heated water buckets will prevent water from freezing, but need an electrical power source. In all cases, horses should have space to drink freely without fear of pushy stablemates.

Horses will drink more water if it is lukewarm than if it is ice-cold. Ensuring that horses have access to salt at all times helps to maintain water intake. Adding 15ml of loose salt (1 tablespoon) to feed once or twice daily encourages water consumption. Horses who are confined to a stall with water available are at greater a risk for developing a colonic impaction than those who are outside all the time. This suggests that exercise, even on the coldest of days, is the most important factor reducing the incidence of impaction colic.



Regular dental care to maintain the grinding ability of the cheek teeth is believed to be important in reducing the incidence of colonic impactions. We sometimes see horses that lose weight in the winter on hay but gain it back on pasture in the spring. These cases are often the result of dental abnormalities that prevent adequate grinding of feed. Inadequate grinding causes inadequate digestion, and can lead to impaction of the colon.

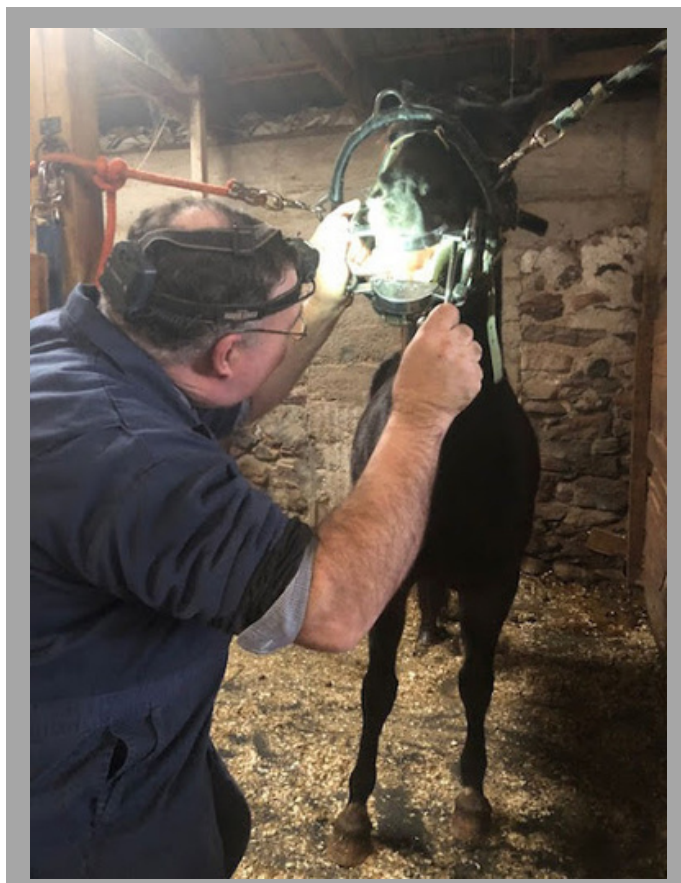


The incidence of colic owing to colonic impaction can be reduced by ensuring that horses get adequate exercise, drink sufficient water, and have regular dentistry to keep them grinding their food well over the winter.

Marigold's owners have booked an appointment for dentistry in February to take advantage of the **February Dental Month Special - 15% off dentistry, including call fee, dental procedures and medication. Call today to book yours.**

For more information about Equine Dentistry, please give us a ring to book your appointment.

Please contact us on 705-722-3232
or by email to info@centralontarivet.com



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