

SAND COLIC

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Still today, each year 10-11% of the horse population suffers from colic. One of the causes of colic, sand ingestion, can be a substantial risk to certain horses.



Signs that your horse may be ingesting too much sand:

- **Diarrhea** - If your horse has diarrhea, either loose feces or expulsion of fluid along with formed manure, this could be due to excessive sand in the digestive tract. Sand can be very irritating to the lining of a horse's intestine, causing this malabsorptive condition.
- **Weight Loss** - A horse may be chronically underweight and/or failing to gain weight despite increased amounts of feed offered.
- **Dull hair coat**
- **Colic** - Signs can range from intermittent and mild due to the weight of sand pulling on the intestine to severe pain caused by a complete blockage, a true "sand impaction".

How do they get it?



Horses ingest sand either through grazing or eating hay or grain off sandy ground. In certain situations the sand can accumulate within the digestive system and the irritation can intensify due to this accumulation. As sand accumulates in the intestinal tract, a combination of the irritant effects and the weight of the sand can lead to impaired motility, reduced absorption of nutrients including water and thus, digestive upset.

How can excessive sand accumulation be diagnosed?

The easiest of method and one that can be performed by any horse owner is the **faecal sediment test**:

1. Collect 5-6 fresh fecal balls (not covered in dirt) and place them in a CLEAN bucket. Fill the bucket about half full with water.
2. Break down the faecal balls with your hand or stick and stir lightly.
3. Leave the mixture for 20 minutes.
4. Pour off the water slowly and measure the amount of sand left in the bottom of the bucket.
5. If you collect more than 1 tablespoon of sand, you have the potential to have sand colic.



Treatment for sand colic?

For a simple sand colic your veterinarian may prescribe psyllium husks and/or a paraffin drench. For more severe sand impactions which do not respond to medical therapy, or cause a displacement of the large bowel as the heavy sand moves the large intestine into the wrong spot, surgery is the only option to fix the impaction +/- secondary displacement.

How can you prevent/manage sand accumulation:

It is recommend that if your horse is exposed to sandy pastures, the first step is to control the amount of sand your horse ingests. Some tips include feeding both grain and hay only out of feeders off the ground and using mats in the feeding area.

For horses that live on sandy pastures we recommend using psyllium husks for 5 days each month. It is important to NOT GIVE PSYLLIUM every day as the microbes in the hind gut will start digesting and breaking down the psyllium instead of letting it pass through and collect and remove sand.