

ENTEROLITHS

By Eleanor Richards, Your Horse, KBR Horse Health Information

Enteroliths or bezoars are stones that form in the intestinal tract of horses. They are made primarily of minerals such as, magnesium, ammonium and phosphate. The minerals form or build up around a foreign object that the horse has accidentally ingested. This can be from the smallest piece of wood, metal or plastic. Over time, minerals from the hay slowly build up around the stone, slowly increasing in size. Left untreated, these mineral stones will continue to grow in the intestinal tract, causing colic and intestinal obstruction, which may be a potentially fatal condition.



ENTEROLITH STONE

There are a variety of situations and conditions that can cause colic in horses. Feed impaction's, gas build up, intestinal displacement and parasites are among the most common factors that can cause abdominal problems. Enteroliths are a less common cause of colic, but because the presence of a stone formation (enterolith) can be fatal and in most cases requires surgery, it is important for the horse owner to become familiar with the causes and signs of enteroliths in horses.

Colic is the first sign that your horse might have an enterolith formation. The symptoms may accelerate as the large intestine becomes filled with gas. Here is a list of colic symptoms to be aware of:

- REFUSED TO EAT HAY OR GRAIN
- NOTICABLE CHANGE IN ATTITUDE
- ATTEMPTIN TO ROLL
- REAPEATED LAYING DOWN
- PAWING OR STOMPING
- STANDING IN A STRETCHED POSITION
- TEMPERATURE, PULSE OR RESPIRATION RATE CAN BE SLIGHTLY ELEVATED
- KICKING AT THE STOMACH OR GLANCING BACK AT THE BARREL

If your horse is already passing smaller enteroliths, then you should suspect that there might be larger ones. There are other behavior signs that may be observed, but are less common:

- LETHARGY OR DEPRESSION
- CRANKY BEHAVIOR
- WEIGHT LOSS
- OCCASIONAL LOOSE STOOL
- POOR PERFORMANCE OR RELUCTANCT TO JUMP OR GO DOWN HILLS



The only treatment that has proved to be successful for horses with colic due to enteroliths is surgical removal. There are some key elements of prevention to consider:

- Cut down on alfalfa. Nearly all the horses experiencing enteroliths had a diet consisting of 50% alfalfa or more. Grass or oat hay is preferred.
- Bran is high in phosphorus which is linked to enterolith formation. Reduce or eliminate bran from horse's diet.
- Increase grain ratio to decrease the pH level in the colon. (Consult your veterinarian when adjusting grain ratio).
- In order to increase the movement of bulk material through the colon, provide grazing or increased feeding schedule to three or four times a day.
- Use straw for bedding instead of shavings. Some horses will nibble on straw which will provide constant low fiber.
- Provide occasional doses of psyllium mucilloid to improve bulk movement. This will help move both small enteroliths and the foreign objects around which they form.
- Keep the digestive system moving by providing consistent and frequent exercise.

It is important to note that for those that live in areas known for having a higher incidence of stones (as in the Mid-west and California), and owners of high-risk breeds (such as Arabians and female horses), you should work with your veterinarian to plan a care program to help minimize the risk of enteroliths.

