

# Why is Colic Still the #1 Disease of the Horse?

by Jay Altman, DVM

Your horse has a complex and delicate digestive system. Modern management of horses means intermittent feeding schedules, concentrated diets, confinement housing and the intake of sand and silt. Add the stresses of training, traveling and competition and your horse needs The Assure System.

Colic has historically been the most common disease in the horse. In the past, internal parasite infestation was the number one cause of colic, especially surgical colic, and by far out-numbered any other causes of colic. Equine medicine has advanced by leaps and bounds over the past two decades, and the quality of care for most horses has advanced along with it. Today, the vast majority of horses are treated for internal parasites on a very regular basis and with a selection of oral paste dewormers that are very effective at reducing and eliminating any internal parasite burden. As equine veterinarians, only occasionally do we see cases of colic caused by internal parasites.

Still, the fact remains that the incidence of colic in our horse population has not undergone a significant reduction. Many equine veterinarians are now discussing

the reasons that, despite the enormous reduction in cases caused by internal parasites, we still see so many colics on such a regular basis.

Through the same period of time as the advent and usage of our effective modern dewormers, there have also been some major shifts in horse management. Due to increasing costs of real estate and the increasing cost of ownership, many horses today are housed on smaller properties and in more intense management situations.

Additionally, with the increased cost of ownership, a higher percentage of our horses are kept for more than just the "occasional ride" and are used for some form of competitive sports.

Both of these factors lead to a list of changes in management and risk factors that negatively impact the health of our modern day horse population.

Below is a list of some of the most common factors that are considered to negatively impact the health of our horses and increase the risk for colic. These are items that have been associated with both gastric and colonic ulcers as well as colic.

- Decrease in pasture turn out.
- Increase in dirt, sand and silt intake, due to dry-lot and stall/run environments.

- Increase in concentrated grain-based diets.
- Feeding of "meals" vs. eating almost continuously throughout the course of a day.
- Increase in stress due to trailering.
- Increase in stress due to competition.
- Increase in stress due to intense training.
- Increased use of NSAIDS such as Phenylbutazone (Bute) and Banamine.

Although there has been no scientific research as proof, there is a theory that many, if not most, intensely-managed horses are always in a state of digestive upset. This being the case, it may only take one small event such as severe change in weather, loss of a barn "mate," change in daily routine, or even irritation due to dirt and sand ingestion to set a horse into critical condition and possibly a colic.

To help control against colic caused by gastric and colonic irritation, it is necessary to consider all of the stressors in your horse's management routine. To further help with his or her digestive management and dirt and sand conditions consider The Assure System in your quest for total digestive health.

To learn more, call 1-877-372-4959, or go to [www.the-assure-system.com](http://www.the-assure-system.com)



**Two Mules**  
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