



CASTRATION

Colts are generally castrated for 2 reasons:

- To prevent unwanted pregnancy
- To make them easier to handle and make them safer to run with other horses

Although castration is a common procedure there can be serious complications and therefore these should be considered before going ahead with surgery.

There are a couple of different approaches to castration: Standing, or under general anaesthetic either in the field or in hospital. Factors that will influence this decision are:

- Age- Foals are too tiny to perform a standing castration but the procedure is much easier. Mature stallions are at higher risk with standing castration.
- Size- ponies may be too small to castrate standing
- Maturity- the colt must be sufficiently mature that both testicles have descended. Some horses may have a retained testicle (the testicle remains inside the abdomen) and these horses must be castrated in the hospital using a more complicated procedure.
- Temperament- Despite heavy sedation some horses will still kick, in these horses the procedure is unsafe to perform standing
- Handling- It is important the colt has been well handled prior to castration otherwise the procedure is very stressful and frightening for the colt and dangerous for the vet and handler
- Breed- certain breeds such as Shires and Standard breeds are at increased risk and therefore it is recommended these horses are castrated in the hospital
- Welfare- while cost may be a factor in deciding which method is used the overriding consideration should be your horse's welfare and we will advise based on this.

WHEN SHOULD I CASTRATE MY COLT?

It is traditional that colts are castrated in the spring of their yearling year but in reality they can be castrated as soon as both testicles have descended into the scrotum. If by 1 year of age both testicles haven't descended it is unlikely that they ever will and the colt should be castrated under general anaesthetic in the hospital. It is preferable to perform castration in the spring or autumn as this avoids the summer when flies are prevalent and winter when there is likely to be heavy mud both of which may increase the risk of infection.



WHERE SHOULD IT BE DONE?

There are cases that we will advise should be done in the hospital but many cases can be done on the yard provided there are suitable facilities, such as access to clean, warm water, someone experienced in handling horses (and not too squeamish!), good lighting and either a large stable or barn or a large flat area of a field. It is best to discuss your facilities with the vet when booking.

AFTERCARE

Advice will be given on a case-by-case basis but in general colts can be turned out into a small paddock the day after surgery. The surgery site should be checked daily for any bleeding (more than dripping blood), swelling or discharge. If your horse does not move around much when turned out gentle in hand walking may be recommended.

The vet may prescribe a short course of antibiotics and/or pain relief. Tetanus anti-toxin will be given to any horse with unknown vaccination status.

If no complications arise the surgery site should be healed within 2 weeks.

POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS

General anaesthesia carries a risk in any horse but may be necessary to perform the procedure. Your vet will discuss this with you at the time.

Some bleeding is normal following castration but it should not be excessive. The advice usually given is that if it is too fast to count the drops you should call your vet.

Tissue may protrude from the wound. Usually this is just a small amount of tunic (tissue that holds the testicle within the scrotum), this can either be left to dry and come away naturally or can be trimmed if necessary. A serious complication is a piece of gut protruding from the wound- in this case you must contact your vet immediately.

FERTILITY

Your colt may remain fertile and display stallion like behaviour following castration therefore should be kept separate from mares and other horses for 2 months following surgery. In some older horses stallion behaviour may not resolve but they will be infertile.