

# The Lead Line

*Leading your horse to a healthy future.*

Elkhorn Veterinary Clinic

February, 2022



## Please Help Us Decide the Future of the Spring Equine Seminar

We had hoped to have a Spring Equine Seminar in March of this year. It would have felt like a return to normal, but we again put those plans on hold when Covid numbers climbed. We're asking for your help in deciding the future of our Spring Seminar, if it should be in-person or online, and what time of year works best for you. Please use the QR code to the right and take our survey. We are looking forward to hearing your thoughts!



## Timely Tips for Spring Appointments

Spring is not just foaling season, it is also vaccination season, Coggins season, and the "let's get ready for the horse shows and trail rides" season. Time becomes a rare commodity, but it doesn't mean our veterinarians and staff are not dedicated to the partnership we have with you in caring for your horse. We want your appointment to go smoothly and allow you ample time to speak with your veterinarian. Here are a few suggestions to help make that possible:

- Make your appointment as soon as you can for optimal scheduling. All our veterinarians are excellent, but we know some clients have their preference.
- We recommend the following core vaccinations for all horses: Tetanus toxoid, rabies, West Nile Virus, Eastern and Western Encephalomyelitis. Other vaccines may be recommended, depending upon your horse's risk level. They are: Equine influenza, Rhinopneumonitis, Potomac Horse Fever, and Strangles. Our client service representatives can offer guidance to help you to determine which vaccinations your horse should receive. We also have a brochure available on our website for you to review. Even so, you may still have questions at your appointment. Your veterinarian will be happy to go over all of them with you.
- Most horses should have their teeth checked annually. When making your appointment, please let us know if you want us to schedule enough time to float your horse's teeth if needed.
- Please mention if you have specific concerns with your horse when you make your appointment. We'll make sure the information is noted in the appointment so the veterinarian can be prepared for your questions.
- Horses frequently don't want to be caught at odd times of the day. Please have your horse caught and in a stall if possible before we arrive for the appointment. We are happy to call you when the veterinarian is on the way to help you make this possible.
- Because we will be taking photos, you'll want to have your horse groomed beforehand if it is the first time we have done a Coggins test on your horse, or your horse as matured since their last Coggins test.
- The morning of the appointment, take Ziploc baggies out to the barn and pick up a couple of fresh fecal balls per horse for the fecal egg count. Remember to clearly identify the horse on the baggie!
- If anything changes between the time you make your appointment and the day of the appointment, feel free to update us!

# How Bad is this Belly Ache?

*A veterinarian is your best resource for assessing your horse's abdominal pain.*

**C**olic is a term used to describe pain in the abdominal cavity. When a horse is colicing, veterinarians attempt to find the source of the discomfort and gauge the severity of the issue starting with the horse's history and a physical exam. Some causes of colic are more prevalent in particular breeds of horses, disciplines, and ages. Some horses will have repeat colic episodes for the same cause, such as for stomach ulcers or gas.

Your vet will examine your horse, paying particular attention to the heart rate. The horse's heart rate is the most important indicator of pain, and therefore it is important to monitor how it changes. Pain relief and sedation is frequently provided. It is important to tell your veterinarian if your horse is on any medications so drug interactions may be prevented. Next, a rectal exam is performed and a stomach tube is passed. The rectal exam is a diagnostic test to palpate for gas or organ displacement. Passing the stomach tube allows for gas to escape and for food to be rinsed out of the stomach. Often, lab work such as a lactate test or a blood panel is recommended to look for problems in organ function. Sometimes liver or kidney disease will present as colic, which can be difficult to diagnose without blood testing.



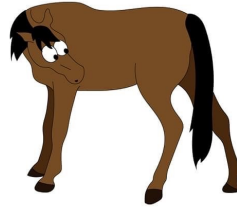
A new diagnostic tool that we will be able to offer our patients is abdominal ultrasound. The Elkhorn Veterinary Clinic has recently acquired a highly portable ultrasound called "The Butterfly". This is a high tech probe that is able to produce real time images on a connected phone or tablet. This great new tool will allow us to rapidly visualize your horse's intestines. From the information gathered, we will be able to better care for your horse's particular needs and make more detailed recommendations on how to treat your horse.

*Dr. Tess Tucker joined the Elkhorn Veterinary clinic in 2020 as a large animal veterinarian.*

## RECOGNIZING COLIC

Horses show signs of abdominal pain in a wide variety of ways.

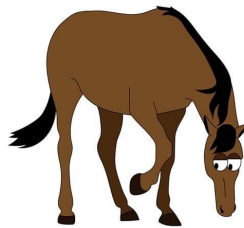
**Among the more common signs of colic are:**



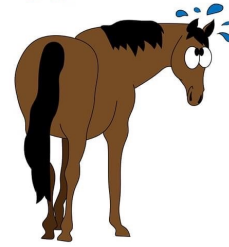
Turning the head toward the flank, kicking or biting at the belly.



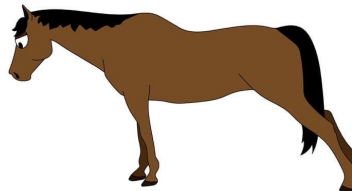
Repeatedly lying down, rolling, and getting up, or attempting to do so.



Pawing.



Inappropriate sweating, rapid breathing and/or flared nostrils, elevated pulse rate.



Stretching out as if to urinate, without doing so.

Leaving food behind or completely disinterested in food; putting the head down to water without drinking.

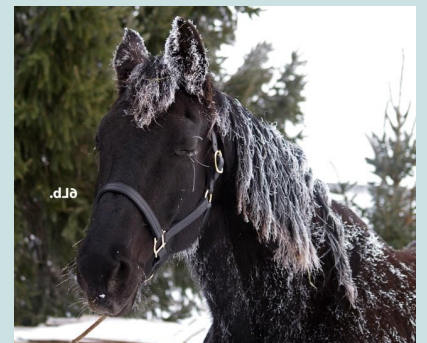
**If you suspect your horse is suffering from colic, alert your veterinarian immediately.**

They may not need to come out and examine the horse if the colic signs are mild, but leave that decision to the veterinarian.

**Winter brings particular challenges that may increase the likelihood of your horse colicing. Here are a few reminders to help your horse avoid a bellyache:**

- Water should be readily available. Your horse needs 10 - 12 gallons per day and prefers to drink water that is warmed above 45 degrees F.
- During cold spells, feed extra hay, not grain, to provide your horse more fuel to keep warm.

- Horses need to move to keep their intestines working. When it is too cold to ride, make sure they have some pasture or arena turn-out.



**Leading your horse to a healthy future.**



*Dr. Burns shares his thoughts on the state of the equine veterinary practitioner today.*

**A**s a veteran equine veterinarian, I never imaged I would be moved to draft an article such as this after 36 years in my beloved profession. From my earliest days, I was intensely drawn to this vocation. I am grateful for the privilege of working with horses and their owners over these past years. I now look at my profession and see myself and my colleagues as a Threatened Species, bordering on Endangered.

*What is causing our dwindling numbers?* In 2005, 5% of incoming veterinary students were planning to become horse doctors. Today, that number is 1%, an 80% drop. Additionally, 50% of new equine veterinarians leave equine medicine or veterinary medicine entirely within their first 5 years. Making the situation more dire is the fact that currently 44% of practicing equine veterinarians are over 50 years of age. Currently 60 equine veterinarians retire each year, and this number is increasing by 1 - 3%.

The entire healthcare community has been affected by compassion fatigue. Veterinarians struggle with an added burden as they are in a unique position of performing euthanasia. Being the last voice for their patient and subsequently rationalizing death can be impactful on the psyche. A recent survey found that 1 in 6 veterinarians have contemplated suicide. The truly devastating statistic is that veterinarians are 3.5 times more likely to actually commit suicide than the general population.

*But why?* The reasons for this crisis are varied and complex but I'd like to mention a number of common stressors:

- **Personality** - This profession attracts highly intelligent, detail-oriented, compassionate, driven perfectionists. Young equine veterinarians oftentimes are left to practice their newly acquired skills in front of a highly discerning clientele which can be quite intimidating, leaving them with unfamiliar feelings of inadequacy.
- **Financial** - The average new equine veterinarian graduates with approximately \$245K of student debt. They generally add another year to their education by accepting a low-paying internship in order to gain practical equine experience that their veterinary school curriculum lacked. When they do begin working, the average starting salary, depending on geographic location, is roughly \$55K per year, lower than for other veterinary

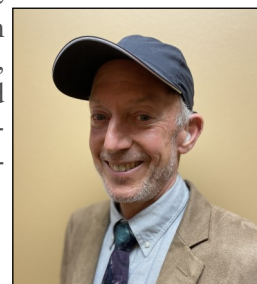
disciplines, leaving them with a heavy debt load that is impossible to overcome.

- **Work/life balance** - A substantial percentage of small animal medicine has now evolved into the creation of special after-hours referral facilities. However, that is not the case for equine veterinarians who continue to provide after hours care to their clients. Days can be long, exhausting and unpredictable creating personal, marital and childcare problems.
- **Physical injury** - The risk of receiving a career-ending, even life-threatening, injury from a horse is real and must be taken into consideration with career and financial planning.
- **Client challenges** - When veterinarians are surveyed about their challenges with clients, equine clientele are among the more challenging. This reasons for this can include the expense coupled with the emotional attachments of owners and their horses, as well as a connected equine community that readily shares opinions (both good and bad) and that can either help or hinder the client to understand medical problems and outcomes.

The Elkhorn Veterinary Clinic has long considered itself a family-friendly business, but we recognized there was more to do to help our young equine veterinarians. We improved work/life balance by hiring additional vets to share the daily load and, more importantly, the hours spent on-call and emergencies. Our veterinarians are fortunate to work in a team of doctors with diverse interests and can feel comfortable calling on each other for advice. Our clinic will not tolerate abuse and supports our veterinarians and staff fully if it is reported. Finally, our parent company provides an Employee Assistance Program which offers free assistance to every employee and family member.

So, I present this to you now because the solutions to the unsustainable reality of declining horse doctors are not simple and will call upon everyone involved: fellow veterinarians, students, educational institutions, and clients. I share this because I know everyone involved has a stake, has compassion, and needs to know.

*Dr. Phil Burns joined the Elkhorn Veterinary Clinic as a large animal/equine veterinarian in 1987.*





Elkhorn Veterinary Clinic  
**2022**  
**Equine Wellness Program**



262-723-2644 • [elkhornvet.com](http://elkhornvet.com)

**T**here is no better time than now to enroll your horse in the Elkhorn Veterinary Clinic Equine Wellness Program. We offer a robust program that not only saves you 25% off your horse's annual essential preventive care, but also includes additional discounts for illness and injury care your horse may need throughout the year.

In these inflationary times, it's good to know that your horse's necessary preventive care expenses won't suffer from sudden increases. You can lock in prices now and keep control over your budget. We even offer a payment plan - pay half down and make five equal monthly payments.

Our Equine Wellness Program covers vaccinations, dental exam and dental float, Coggins test, fecal egg count, biannual health exams and nutrition consultations. As soon as your horse is enrolled, you may take advantage of the additional discounts for examinations and diagnostics such as blood work and radiographs in the event your horse becomes ill or injured.

It's easy to enroll! **Scan the QR code** to the right to learn more about our program as well as complete the enrollment form.

Or visit [elkhornvet.com/services/equine-preventive-care](http://elkhornvet.com/services/equine-preventive-care).



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**Call 262-723-2644 • Email: [largeanimals@elkhornvet.com](mailto:largeanimals@elkhornvet.com)**



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