

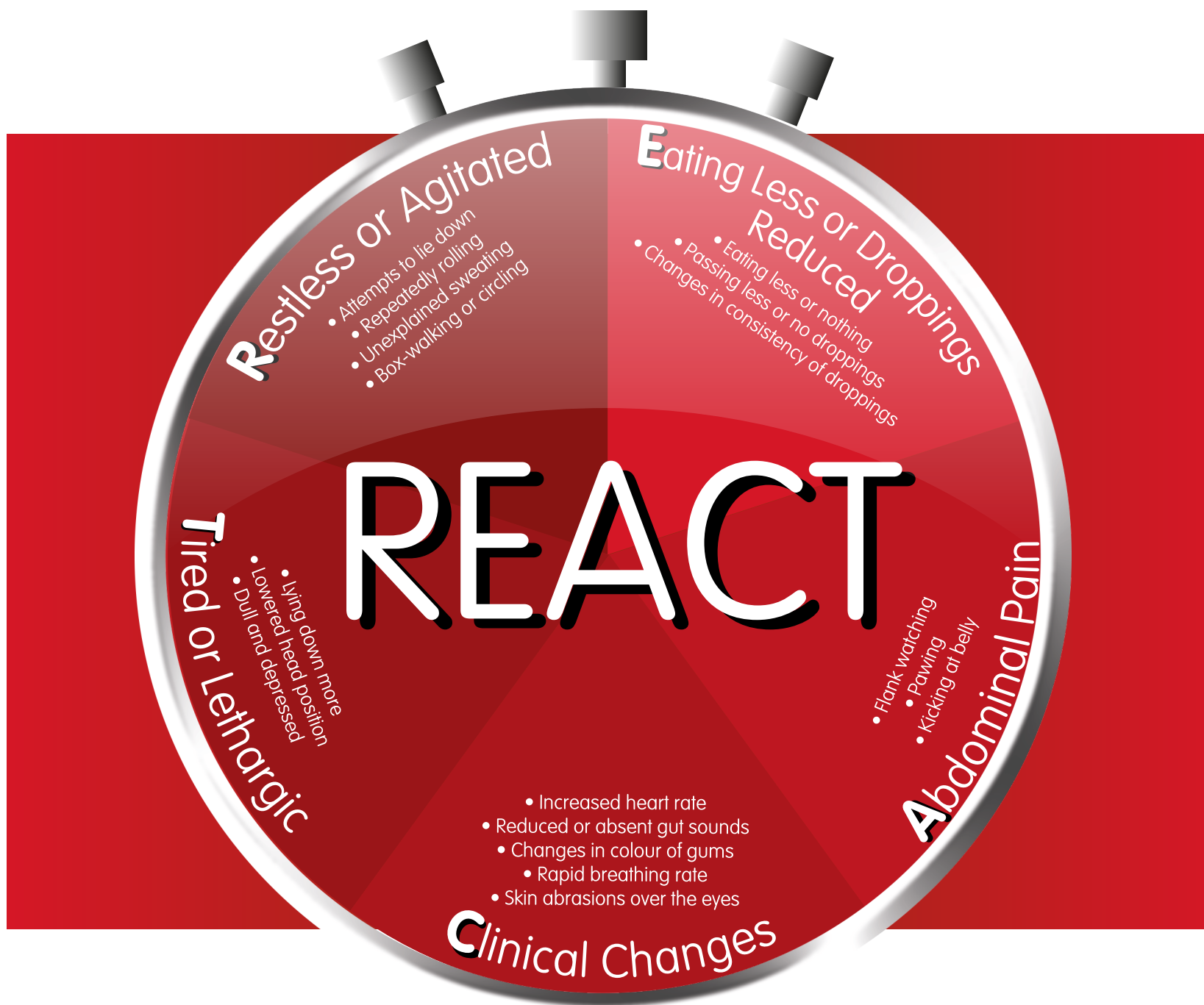
# RECOGNISING THE SIGNS OF COLIC



The University of  
Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

The  
British  
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Horse owners, or the main person responsible for the care of horses, play a vital role in recognising the early signs of colic. Colic cases can quickly deteriorate so early recognition and prompt veterinary attention is vital to increase the chance of recovery for the horse.

# REACT!

If you notice any change in your horse's behaviour or your horse is showing signs of distress, think REACT. Even the most subtle changes could be the only sign from your horse indicating that there is a problem. The signs shown by the horse can be extremely variable and can also be influenced by the severity and type of colic.

The five REACT signs are the most common and important indicators of colic (based on research from The University of Nottingham). The signs include:

## Restless or Agitated

- Attempts to lie down
- Repeatedly rolling
- Unexplained sweating
- Box-walking or circling

## Eating Less or Droppings Reduced

- Eating less or nothing at all
- Passing fewer or no droppings
- Changes in consistency of droppings

## Abdominal Pain

- Flank watching
- Pawing
- Kicking at belly

## Clinical Changes

- Increased heart rate
- Reduced or absent gut sounds
- Changes in colour of gums (healthy gums should be a salmon pink colour)
- Rapid breathing rate
- Skin abrasions over the eyes (indicates that the horse has been thrashing around and has caught this prominent area on their face; for example on the walls of the stable)

## Tired or Lethargic

- Lying down more than usual
- Lowered head position
- Dull and depressed

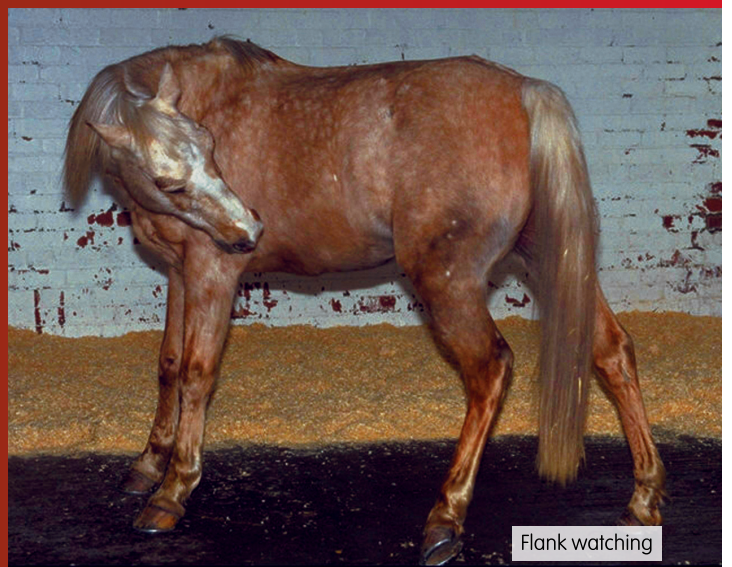
Horses may show any of these signs, and it is important that owners/keepers contact their vet if any of these signs are observed or there are any concerns. Nottingham's research showed that classically described signs of colic, such as flank watching and kicking at the belly are not seen in every case, and therefore waiting for these signs to be displayed may delay diagnosing a problem or cause one to be missed completely. Other signs, such as eating less or passing fewer droppings, are more commonly seen and are important in recognising a problem early.

The REACT signs are not an exhaustive list of every possible sign of colic, but instead highlight five key aspects of your horse's health and behaviour that should be considered.

The descriptions for each of the five areas (e.g. flank watching, pawing, kicking at belly for abdominal pain) are listed in order of how common and important they are according to scientific research.

If you have any concerns for your horse's health  
**REACT NOW - CALL YOUR VET**

Photo: Redwings Horse Sanctuary



For more information  
please visit: [bhs.org.uk/colic](https://bhs.org.uk/colic)