

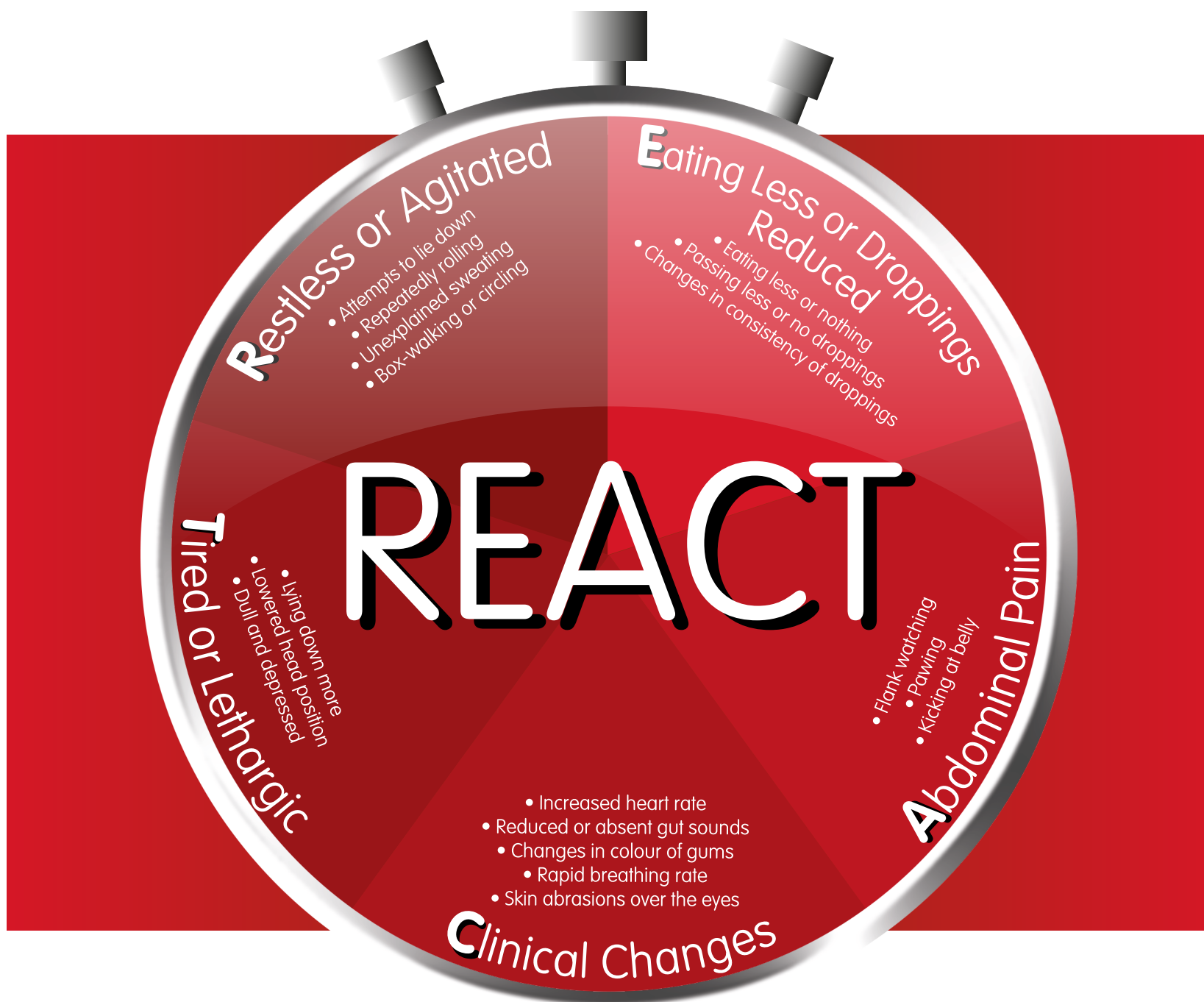
WHAT WILL MY VET DO IF MY HORSE HAS COLIC?



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It can be difficult to find out why a horse has developed colic, and in many cases the exact cause may not be identified. Your vet will go through a series of steps when they examine your horse to help rule out more serious problems and attempt to establish the most likely reasons your horse is showing signs of pain.

It is helpful for your vet to establish the history of the horse and therefore, they will ask a number of questions depending on the particular circumstances of each case. These questions are likely to include if your horse has had any previous health problems, especially colic, current management of the horse and any recent changes^{1,2,3}. The best individual to answer these questions is the person who is mainly responsible for the care and management of the horse. If this person is not available, you may need to contact them or ask them to provide this information to the vet at a later stage. Establishing the history of the horse is a very important part of the vet's assessment as it can help indicate likely causes, but the vet will also use this information to give any advice on avoiding problems in the future^{2,3}.

The next step is the physical examination where the vet will make a full assessment of your horse. Once again, the examination performed will depend on the circumstances of each case, but may include listening to your horse's heart, chest and gut sounds, checking their temperature and gum colour, as well as observing and assessing how much pain the horse is in⁴. The physical examination rarely helps identify the exact cause of colic, but is very important in determining how severe the problem is, and which further tests may be needed.

The vet may request assistance to keep the horse as still and quiet as possible during the physical examination. However, if the horse is very restless, showing signs of significant pain or becomes too difficult to handle, the vet may administer sedatives or painkillers to help them settle and to help keep everyone involved safe. Some situations can be difficult and distressing. If you have any concerns about holding the horse or assisting the vet, you must inform them so they can make alternative arrangements.

The vet may then perform some further tests to assess why the horse has colic but again, the tests used can vary between individuals. The most commonly used diagnostic tests are rectal examination and nasogastric intubation (also called passing a stomach tube)³.

1. Curtis, L., et al., Systematic Review of Risk Factors for Equine Colic. *Equine Veterinary Journal*, 2014. 46: p. 21-21.

2. Scantlebury, C.E., et al., Recurrent colic in the horse: Incidence and risk factors for recurrence in the general practice population. *Equine Veterinary Journal*, 2011. 43: p. 81-88.

3. Jennings, K., et al. Prospective survey of veterinary practitioners' primary assessment of equine colic: clinical features, diagnoses, and treatment of 120 cases of large colon impaction. *BMC Vet Res*, 2014. 10 DOI: 10.1186/1746-6148-10-S1-S2.

4. Curtis, L., et al., Prospective study of the primary evaluation of 1016 horses with clinical signs of abdominal pain by veterinary practitioners, and the differentiation of critical and non-critical cases. *Acta Vet Scand*, 2015. 57: p. 69.



A vet measuring a horse's heart rate



A sedated pony

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