

The Philip Leverhulme Equine Hospital



UNIVERSITY OF
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The team at the Philip Leverhulme Equine Hospital are delighted that your horse is making a good recovery.

These notes are intended to help you through the next few weeks and to explain how your horse needs to be managed in order to stand the best chance of making a full recovery.

This leaflet deals with the 5 most important aspects of managing a horse after colic surgery

1. **Managing the abdominal incision**
2. **Box rest**
3. **Re-introduction to exercise**
4. **Feeding**
5. **Post operative colic**

Any further queries:

Whilst your horse is hospitalised following colic surgery, updates on your horse's condition are available from 10.30am-5pm Monday -Friday from the Equine Reception **Tel: 0151 794 6041** The veterinary surgeon in charge of your horse's treatment at The Philip Leverhulme Equine Hospital will keep you updated on a regular basis.

For any non-urgent enquiries or general questions regarding colic please refer to our website <http://www.liv.ac.uk/equinecolic/> or send an e-mail to colic@liv.ac.uk.

We are always keen to hear how horses are progressing after colic surgery, so you may receive a phone call or e-mail from one of our team within the next few months

Information for the owners of horses recovering from colic surgery

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q. My horse is going mad in his stable. Can I turn him out before the recommended 8 weeks are up?

A. You are strongly advised not to. If you do, your horse is likely to gallop around the field bucking and kicking, putting huge strain on his abdominal incision. This will greatly increase his risk of hernia formation. Please speak to your veterinary surgeon if concerned.

Q. Can I worm my horse and get him vaccinated?

A. Vaccination can proceed as usual. It is safe to worm most horses 2- 3 weeks after colic surgery but a few horses have special worming requirements. If in doubt, check with your own veterinary surgeon.

Q. Can my mare have a foal after colic surgery?

A. Yes, but bear in mind the strain on the mare's abdomen during service and delivery of a foal. It is recommended that mares are not covered for at least 4 months after colic surgery.

Q. Will my horse be able to return to the same level of competition after colic surgery?

A. Yes. Many of our previous patients have successfully returned to a high level competition after an appropriate convalescent period. This includes racing, eventing and show-jumping.

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Information for the owners of horses recovering from colic surgery

1. Managing the abdominal incision

When a horse has an abdominal operation, it is necessary to make an incision through the skin and the abdominal wall. This incision is usually between 15 and 30cm long. It is quite usual for a moderate amount of swelling to be present around the front part of the wound at the time of discharge from the hospital. Please check your horse's wound daily for the first two weeks back at home. You should look for:

- Excessive swelling
- Discharge of blood or pus
- Opening of the wound edges

If you are concerned about any of the signs listed above, please consult your own veterinary surgeon. Approximately 16% of horses recovering from colic surgery develop a wound infection. It can delay wound healing but, with appropriate management, usually resolves.

2. Box rest

All abdominal incisions are very slow to heal. Research shows that even one year after such an incision the body wall has only regained 80% of its original strength. Any exercise that prematurely increases strain on the incisions (e.g. bucking, rearing, galloping around a field), increases the risk of a hernia forming at the surgical site. A hernia is where the abdominal wall incision separates, causing intestines to create a 'bulge' of skin at the surgical site. Although not life-threatening, incisional hernias are a cosmetic blemish and many require expensive surgical repair.

In order to minimise the risk of hernia formation, ALL owners of horses who have undergone colic surgery are **STRONGLY ADVISED** to keep their horses on box rest for 8 weeks after discharge from the hospital. Box rest means:

- Your horse is kept stabled at all times apart from walking in-hand.
- Where possible you should take your horse for walks, and graze in hand for 2-3 times a day, but always on a lead rope and under control.
- Your horse should never be loose and free to gallop around.

Approximately 10% of horses that have had colic surgery do develop an incisional hernia. The advice above will decrease the risk of it happening to your horse.

3. Re-introduction to exercise

At the end of the 8 weeks box rest, your horse can be turned-out in a paddock. You are strongly advised to use a small paddock, with no other horses in it. This will allow your horse to begin moving around freely without putting unnecessary strain on the healing abdominal incision. Some horses benefit from mild sedation when first turned out, to prevent them galloping around wildly. Talk to your veterinary surgeon about this. The amount of time your horse spends in this small paddock should be slowly increased over a period of several weeks. Some horses are not suitable candidates for pasture turn-out and controlled exercise is best achieved with a rider on board or on a horse walker. Talk to your vet about this option if you are concerned about your horse's likely reaction to pasture turn-out.

After 8 weeks in a paddock (16 weeks after surgery), you can re-commence ridden exercise. Remember: your horse is unfit and the abdominal incision is still gaining in strength. You should begin a regime of steadily increasing exercise over several months.

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4. Feeding

Following colic surgery your horse will be stabled for 8 weeks without doing any exercise. Energy requirements for this period are minimal. Unless otherwise advised, your should:

- Feed minimal concentrates
- Provide frequent to free access to forage (hay/haylage)
- Provide constant access to fresh water
- Make any changes in feeding very slowly (e.g. over 2-3 weeks).

Remember, horses get 80% of their energy requirements from forage, not from cereals or other concentrates.

5. Post operative colic

Following colic surgery it is possible that your horse may have further episodes of colic, up to a third of horses suffer from one episode after discharge from hospital. These colic signs can occur at any time following colic surgery, most horses respond to medical therapy with pain relief, however a small percentage do not respond to medical therapy and may then require a second surgery or euthanasia if a second surgery is not an option.

Any further queries:

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