



Castration

Why castrate a colt?

Colts are castrated to prevent unwanted behaviour and also prevent unwanted pregnancy. Geldings are generally easier to manage in a yard environment.

Factors to consider

Before castrating (also known as gelding) your colt, you should discuss with your Vet the most appropriate method for him. The procedure can be done under standing sedation using local anaesthetic, this means the colt remains standing but does not feel anything. The other method is under general anaesthetic with the colt lying down and totally unaware. Factors such as age, size, maturity, temperament, handling and breed will all need to be taken into consideration before you and your Vet decide the best option for your colt.

When to castrate a colt

Castration can be performed at any age but ideally it is done between six and twelve months of age. Leaving it until they are older will increase their risk of complications and makes any learnt unwanted stallion behaviour less likely to resolve with castration. There is no evidence that foals castrated late develop any differently from those castrated earlier. Ideally castration is performed in either spring or autumn, to avoid flies and deep mud, both of which can increase the risk of post-operative complications.

Both testicles need to have descended into the scrotum for castration to occur. If only one testicle is present in the scrotum, this is known as a rig. Sometimes the undescended testicle will drop with more time, but if it does not by 1 year of age it is unlikely to and will require hospitalisation for castration. The procedure for removing a retained testicle will require more invasive surgery than a routine castrate.

Where to castrate

Colts can either be castrated in the clinic at Wendover Heights Equine, or at your yard providing the facilities are suitable. Please discuss this with your Vet prior to booking castration.

If your colt is castrated at home, we will require an experienced handler, preferably someone who is not squeamish. We will also require a clean well lit stable or a flat dry grassy paddock, this should be discussed with your Vet depending on whether the castration is performed standing or under general anaesthetic. Warm clean water should be available.

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The surgical procedure

The procedure involves both testicles being removed via a surgical incision to the scrotum. There will be two incisions, one for each testicle. The cord connecting the testicle to the abdomen will be crushed and cut, thus removing the testicle. The incisions will then be left open for drainage. There may be slight variations in the surgical technique but this will be decided on by the Surgeon.

Post-operative care

Your Vet will discuss the exact details of post-operative care on case by case basis. Cleanliness and close observation are important.

Usually it is recommended that the gelding is stabled or kept in a small area for twelve to twenty four hours post-surgery to allow sufficient time for any bleeding to stop. After this your horse can be turned out into a small paddock to encourage gentle exercise, this will encourage drainage and minimise swelling. Your horse may be prescribed a short course of antibiotics and painkillers following surgery and your Vet will check your horse is protected against tetanus.

You will need to regularly check the surgical site to detect complications, but you should be careful and stay safe. Providing there are no complications the incisions should usually heal in about two weeks. After castration, there is a risk your gelding can still be fertile and cause an unwanted pregnancy for six weeks. We recommend he is kept separate from mares for at least 6 weeks after castration.

Complications

Castration is generally regarded as being a routine procedure, and in the vast majority of cases it is both straightforward and uncomplicated. However, it should not be forgotten that it is an invasive surgery and occasionally complications will occur.

Sedation and anaesthetics always carry an element of risk but every effort is made to minimize this risk. Bleeding is a potential post-operative complication. A small amount of blood dripping from the wound in the first twenty-four hours after castration is normal, but if the drips are so fast you can't count them, you should contact your Vet immediately. Another common complication is infection. This can occur as horses do not live in a clean environment despite everyones best efforts. This can be seen as heat, increased swelling of the sheath and scrotum and discharge from the wound. The gelding may also look uncomfortable and depressed. If this occurs you should contact your Vet. Although it is rare, a more serious complication can arise, where intestine prolapses from the castration site. This is a true emergency and your Vet should be called immediately.

Please contact us to discuss your colt if you have any questions

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