

## GENERAL ANAESTHESIA OF THE HORSE

### What happens when your horse undergoes general anaesthesia?

Several routine elective and emergency procedures in the horse require general anaesthesia. The decision to anaesthetise your horse is not made lightly and we will always discuss this with you. While everything is done to ensure patient safety, every general anaesthetic carries a certain risk and this risk is higher in horses than in cats, dogs and people.

### What happens to your horse prior to undergoing a general anaesthetic?

- Our veterinarians will perform a complete examination and simple blood test to make sure your horse is in good general health. Horses being admitted as an emergency might require stabilisation before anaesthesia.
- Your horse will be starved for 6-10 hours before an elective procedure to decrease the risk of colic.
- An intravenous catheter will be placed to administer medications.
- The shoes will be removed as they might cause damage.
- Your horse will receive painkillers or antibiotics, depending on the surgery.

### Risks of general anaesthesia

Our trained staff do everything possible to minimise any risk but risk cannot be avoided completely. On very rare occasions, a horse might die suddenly during induction, the operation or the recovery.

- Tissue damage (e.g. damage to the skin or eye) usually heals quickly and completely but can on rare occasions become more severe.
- Horses can develop colic after anaesthesia. Impaction colic is most common but all variations of colic can occur, some of them severe.

Generalised muscle (myopathy) or nerve damage (neuropathy) can occur during the anaesthetic procedure or recovery. Depending on the severity of the damage the horse might need pain relief and assistance to stand up; with nerve damage occasionally needing the application of a splint. Symptoms usually subside within 3-5 days but this can take longer. Unfortunately, with extensive damage, the horse might not be able to recover or have lasting limitations – this is extremely rare.

Damage to the upper airway tract, more specifically the larynx, can occur. This might cause swelling and obstruction of the airways in severe cases. We always monitor patients carefully during recovery and will perform an emergency tracheostomy (creating an opening in the windpipe) if signs of an obstruction become apparent.

Allergic reactions, most likely to a drug or blood product, can happen. Most commonly, the horse will show a skin reaction which usually resolves rapidly.

Occasionally, trauma during recovery can cause long bone fractures. Unfortunately, those are often not repairable and the horse will need to be euthanised.

**Our team of highly experienced anaesthesiologists, surgeons and nurses always work to the highest standards to ensure the safety of your horse. Our team's first priority is the wellbeing of your horse during the anaesthetic and surgical procedure.**



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