

Fact Sheet

Equine Castration

When to castrate?

Castration, surgical removal of both testicles, is a commonly performed routine surgical procedure that is usually quick and straightforward.

Castrations can be performed at any time of year however they should ideally be carried out in either the spring or autumn months as this helps to avoid the flies associated with summer and wet/muddy conditions with winter.

A colt/stallion can be castrated at any age, however, in older horses it can sometimes be preferable to perform castration under general anaesthesia which may require use of an operating theatre depending on the case.

Both testicles must have descended into the scrotum for a colt to be castrated standing.



Where to castrate?

Surgery can be performed under either standing sedation or general anaesthesia. This decision may be based, among other factors, on the size or age of the horse/pony and the temperament or previous handling experience of the horse.

The operation can be carried out either at the horse's yard (providing you have adequate facilities) or at the practice.

If castrated at home (using sedation and local anaesthetic) a competent, experienced handler is essential. Clean, warm water and a clean environment will also be required.

The procedure

There are two methods of performing a castration:

Standing castration under sedation

Horses are heavily sedated and local anaesthetic is injected into the scrotum and testicles before surgery is performed.

Castration under general anaesthetic

Castration under general anaesthetic is usually performed in small ponies and Shetlands and is quicker and safer, for both our vets and patients, especially in poorly handled or very nervous animals.

Most castrations are performed via an open surgical technique where the wounds are left fully open to drain.

Occasionally a closed technique is performed where the vaginal tunic is opened to allow removal of the testicle and then closed again with sutures.

Equine Castration | Fact Sheet

Are there any risks?

- Infection acquired at the time of surgery, or from mud and dust contamination subsequently, is the most common post-operative complication. This emphasises the importance of hygiene wherever the horse is castrated
- Bleeding is a frequent complication of the open technique but is usually, but not always, self-limiting. **If you notice excessive bleeding please contact us urgently**
- Herniation of the abdominal contents through the wound, which is more common in foals and in older horses operated on using the open technique. This risk is minimised by using the closed technique.
- If the closed technique is your preference, this will require a general anaesthetic. The administration of any general anaesthetic does carry an element of risk

Please note: post-operative swelling is normal and usually reaches its maximum at about five days after the operation before reducing. Gentle exercise during this period reduces swelling.



Castration preparation checklist

- Is your colt healthy?
- Is he vaccinated against tetanus?
- Are both testicles descended?
- Have you decided upon the method of castration?
- Do you understand the potential risks of castration surgery?

If the procedure is to be done at home:

- Are your facilities suitable?
- Is sufficient help available?
- Is there adequate clean, warm water?

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This factsheet was created by the VetPartners Equine Team, with assistance from our Marketing Team and Veterinary Regulatory Advisors.

For further information, please contact your local VetPartners Equine Veterinary Practice on:

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Together with our practices, our focus is on providing an excellent service to our equine clients.

No two practices are the same, and we understand and embrace that independent spirit.