



Waterlane  
EQUINE VETS

# FACTSHEETS

## Castration

Castration is the most common surgical procedure that we perform. It is usually performed when the colt is less than two years old and both testicles have descended. The whole process takes around 30 - 40 minutes. Castrations are most commonly performed under standing sedation and local anaesthesia. In certain situations we may recommend your horse is castrated under a general anaesthetic, for example donkeys of any age and stallions over 4 years old. This is because they have an increased risk of bleeding and their vessels may need to be ligated (tied up) with suture material. We may also recommend miniature horses and ponies to be done under a general anaesthetic because of their size and therefore tricky access!

We normally perform castrations in the morning as this allows you to monitor your horse afterwards. If possible, care should be taken to avoid carrying out the procedure in very hot weather or when there is a lot of fly activity as this can potentially increase the risk of infection. Food and water can both be provided as normal beforehand. Below are few things you can do to help in preparation for the vet's arrival:

- Make sure your horse is clean - you wouldn't have surgery covered in mud!
- Have a bucket of warm, clean water available
- Ensure your horse's bedding is clean and there is good lighting in the stable
- Remember to bring your horse's passport

Ideally your horse will have already been vaccinated against tetanus, but if this is not the case your vet will give tetanus anti-toxin to provide immediate protection, and will often start the horse's vaccinations at the same time.

The vet will then examine your horse, making sure that two testicles are present and there are no heart abnormalities detected on auscultation. Anti-inflammatory and antibiotic injections will often be given prior to the surgery. Your horse will then be sedated quite heavily so they cannot feel the procedure.



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After an initial scrub of the scrotum and surrounding area, local anaesthetic will be injected into each testicle and the surrounding skin to make it numb. A sterile scrub of the testicle and surrounding area will then be performed.

## The Castration

The vet will remove each testicle through its own incision, one for each side. An emasculator is used to clamp the blood vessels and muscle above the testicle; this is left in place for approximately 3 minutes per testicle to stop bleeding. There is, however, likely to be some bleeding; this is quite normal afterwards as long as you can count the drips (as opposed to it being a continuous flow). Your vet will not close the incisions as the risk of complications, including infection, is increased if the surgical site cannot drain properly.

## Aftercare

Your horse will remain sleepy for up to a couple of hours following sedation and cannot have anything to eat in this time, although water should be available. When he is fully awake, he should remain in his stable for a few hours. This period of standing still allows blood clots to form in the cut arteries and veins, and prevents further bleeding from occurring. After this period, turnout is ideal as it reduces swelling. Do not turn him out with any mares as he can still successfully cover a mare for at least a week! If your horse has been castrated when flies are active then a Pyrethrin based fly repellent should be used.

If turnout is not possible, then walking out in hand should be done for a minimum of 15 - 30 minutes twice a day. Approximately a week after castration, your horse will no longer be able to impregnate a mare but hormone levels may take 4 weeks to subside.

## Medications

Your vet may prescribe a course of anti-inflammatories, such as Equipalazone® (or 'bute' as it is commonly known), to help keep swelling down and reduce pain. Your vet may also choose to prescribe antibiotics, depending on the degree of sterility that was achieved.



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## Complications

The most common complications of castration:

- Bleeding – this may occur intermittently for a couple of days afterwards; as long as you can count the drips it is normal.
- Swelling – some swelling is to be expected and normally lasts for up to 5 days. Cold hosing and exercise helps, if the sheath area becomes very swollen or particularly on one side then your vet should be contacted.
- Infection – If you see pus and/or the site becomes very hot and swollen or your horse becomes off colour, infection should be suspected and your vet should be called. Regular exercise to encourage drainage reduces the risk of infection.
- Exposed tissue – if you suspect tissue is coming out of one or both of the wounds then please call your vet to check this. In extreme circumstances, intestine (looks like a bunch of sausages) can come from the wound – this will require emergency surgery.
- Persistent stallion like behaviour – some geldings will retain learned behaviour from their earlier life with testicles, this does not mean they are a 'rig'.

As always, if you ever have any concerns with your horse post-castration, just give us a call. We are always happy to discuss any worries you may have.