

Castration.

Castration is one of the most common surgical procedures performed by equine vets and is performed mainly as a management strategy for horses that have no breeding future. Most colts are castrated as either yearlings or two year olds, but they can be castrated at any age as long as both testicles are present.

For the majority of horses the surgery is performed standing, using sedation and local anaesthetic, but for stallions that are 4 years old or older, or stallions that have covered mares, we prefer to have them into the practice as the procedure may need be performed under a general anaesthetic.

When you are thinking about having your colt castrated, there are a few things to consider;

- Weather and time of year- We don't like to castrate colts when the weather is very cold and icy as he will need lots of exercise during the days following the operation. Neither do we like castrating colts during very warm weather as the flies can be a problem.
- Age and condition- The older your colt is, the longer it may take for him to lose his stallion-like behaviour. If he is very coltish, it may take several weeks before this behaviour settles down. He also needs to be in good health.
- Vaccinations- We would recommend that he is fully vaccinated. If your colt isn't vaccinated against tetanus, we can give him an injection which will protect him against tetanus whilst he is recovering from the operation.

On the day of the operation.

So after making the decision to have your colt castrated, what do you expect to happen? As previously mentioned we castrate the majority of colts standing under sedation so on the big day he can have his breakfast as normal. We will need him to be stabled in a nice clean box and will require a couple of buckets of clean warm water. After examining him to check that he is fit and well, we will sedate him. His scrotum will be cleaned and disinfected and then local anaesthetic is injected in to each testicle. The operation consists of a skin incision being made over the testicle and then a special instrument called an emasculator is used to remove the testicle whilst clamping the various blood vessels and structures associated with the testicle. This is repeated for the other testicle. The whole procedure usually takes between 30 – 60 minutes. As part of his post operative care, we administer an anti-inflammatory injection which is also a pain killer, and a long acting anti-biotic injection.

Aftercare.

It is important to observe the gelding carefully for the next few hours as he comes round from his sedation and for any signs of haemorrhage. As the skin incision is not sutured closed, the wound may drip blood for several hours or even days. If you can count the drops then this is ok. The area will also swell over the next few days, exercise is important in preventing excessive swelling and aiding local drainage. Horses should be

exercised twice daily for the first 5-7 days after surgery, usually this involves being turned out in the field but he may also need 15 minutes walking in hand a couple of times a day.

Possible complications and when to call the vet.

- Excessive Haemorrhage.

As stated above a small amount of blood dripping is normal but if the blood is flowing like water out of a tap you need to contact the vet immediately.

- Excessive Swelling.

This is the most common complication of castrations and in most cases the problem will resolve with more exercise, but in some cases a course of anti-inflammatories will be prescribed.

- Local infection.

This is another common complication of castration because in most cases the operation is carried out under conditions where sterility cannot be ensured. The wound will usually swell and discharge can be present at the incisions. A course of anti-biotics are usually all that is needed.

- Anything hanging out of the wound.

If there is anything hanging out of the wound you must contact your vet. A rare but potentially disastrous complication of castration is when a loop of intestine travels through the inguinal canal from the abdomen and into the scrotum and then out through the scrotal incision. This is an emergency and it is important to contact your vet immediately. It would usually occur within a few hours of surgery.

So to summarise, if the wound is bleeding, if you can count the drops it's ok but if it's a steady stream, or if there is anything hanging from the incision you should contact your vet immediately.