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A Tradition of Leadership and Excellence in Equine Medicine

Colic in the post-foaling broodmare Faith E. Hughes, DVM, Dipl., ACVS

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Colic in the post-foaling broodmare (immediately to 3 months) can often be more serious more quickly than colic in other horses and should be considered carefully by the caretaker. It is important to know that while post-foaling broodmares are susceptible to all of the same things that cause colic in other horses, there are some types of colic that are unique or at least more common in the post-foaling mare. It is also important to know that many mares will colic mildly in the immediate post-foaling period as a response to her Oxytocin that is being released to pass the placenta and begin uterine involution. This type of colic is usually mild and responds well to a single dose of Banamine.

The types of colic that are more specific to the post-foaling mare include damage to the uterus or its attachment (the broad ligament) such as a uterine tear or rupture or severe hemorrhage. Post foaling broodmares are also more prone to develop twisted large colons, which is one of the more severe types of colic.

Unfortunately, prevention of these conditions is impossible, but there are some things that we consider to be helpful in improving the mare's prognosis. Foaling should be attended for many reasons, one of which is to be aware of the amount of effort and any difficulty that the mare may have during the event. A mare that experiences a dystocia is at higher risk for damage to the uterus or related structures. Although we cannot prove that diet change is responsible for twisted large colons, we strongly believe, based on the histories of mares suffering from twisted colons, that radical diet changes are partially responsible. These changes include increasing the amount fed, particularly of highly fermentable feeds such as alfalfa hay or concentrate, or the addition of a new feedstuff (grain or hay) following foaling.

The key to improving the prognosis for these mares is prompt aggressive treatment, which may include referral. There is no reason not to begin to treat a post-foaling mare like any other colic but it is imperative that if she does not respond to basic treatment or is in distress (shaking, sweating, violently rolling, etc.) that time is not wasted, and more aggressive intervention is started. Many of these considerations can be fatal and tend to happen quickly. The loss of a

mare in and of itself is devastating but also creates the need for a nurse mare, which is often difficult to find, so anything that can be done to improve her chances of survival is warranted.