



COLT CASTRATION

Castration is the surgical removal of both testicles. The operation always involves a skin incision, and different ways of stopping the haemorrhage after removal of the testes. The surgical site can then be sutured or left open.

At the stables, or at the House & Jackson Equine Clinic?

Castrations can be performed either at the stabling address or within our surgical facilities at our Equine Clinic. We prefer to perform all operations in our theatre if at all possible. It allows us to operate in a much cleaner environment, have plenty of trained helpers and provide a more safe area for induction and recovery from general anaesthesia. We will also monitor the patient and provide extra treatment if necessary and thus the risk of complications can be reduced.

Standing castrations are the only procedure we recommend carrying out at your stables. Bringing the colt to us makes the operation cheaper, because we don't have to dispatch two vets to your yard. We will also monitor the horse for a while after the operation, which takes considerable worry out of the procedure. If you cannot bring your colt to the clinic, we will need the following facilities at your yard:

- An able bodied assistant to hold the colt for pre-medication and support a tied back leg during the operation.
- An owner/agent to sign the consent form and provide relevant details about the colt.
- A clean colt.
- A clean, flat, smooth dry and large area free from obstacles and other animals; such as a paddock (weather pending) or large bedded barn.

General anaesthetic or standing under sedation?

A general anaesthetic allows the surgeon more access and the operation is tidier. If the horse has a high or retained testicle, general anaesthetic is the only option. If you choose a closed castration (see below), general anaesthetic is a must. Anaesthetics do carry a risk, which includes (rarely) muscle or nerve inflammation, bone fracture during recovery and even death.

Standing castrations avoid these rare complications, but it is more difficult to access the operation site. The animal has to be tall enough, and well enough behaved to cope with this. It is impossible to tie off the access to the belly, so the risk of hernia is higher.

Open or closed castration?

Open or closed refers to whether or not the vaginal tunic (access to the abdomen) gets opened and tied off. It does not reflect closing of the skin or not. We usually only suture the skin of horses that have had the closed castration.

Closed castration involves the placement of a ligature on the sac around the testicle. The operation is completely sterile in our theatre, with everyone gowned and gloved. The skin can then be sutured. This seems to cause less post-operative complications. This procedure can only be carried out at our premises, and is advisable for animals above 3½ years. Hernias (where intestine protrudes outside the abdomen) are less likely with this technique. Horses that have undergone this method of castration can be brought back to full work quicker than after open castration

Routine castration could be open or closed as a technique (see above), but will involve an open skin wound that allows drainage. This could also result in infection getting into the wound afterwards. Castrations with open skin wounds have to be employed in field situations or standing surgery. It is not recommended (but it is possible) to use this technique on donkeys or horses over 3½ years old.

Retained testicles

It is important that both testicles have descended fully. If they have not, it is essential that the colt is brought into the clinic for castration, as it may be necessary to open the abdominal cavity to find the absent testicle(s). If the testicle is in the abdomen the surgery will be much more expensive than routine castration. If the testicle is in the groin, the operation will be slightly more complicated than a straightforward castration, which will be reflected in the cost. Our vet can check the colt before the operation to enable us to give you an opinion of the likely procedure and cost.

Insurance

If your horse is insured, your Insurance Company will need to be notified well in advance of your plan to give the horse a full anaesthetic or any planned operation; otherwise they would not insure the risks entailed by it. Some companies may require us to confirm that the horse has no health problems that could adversely affect his anaesthetic. This test would be carried out by us regardless of the Insurance position, but they may want us to fax them a brief report.

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Vaccination and starvation

It is preferable that the colt has been fully vaccinated against tetanus. If he is not adequately protected, a temporary anti-toxin will be administered which you will be charged for. The first vaccination can be carried out at the same time, if you wish.

Horses need to be starved for at least four hours prior to the general anaesthetic. All anaesthetics and surgical procedures carry risks of serious complications including death. We have good monitoring equipment and an experienced anaesthetist at the Practice, which together with the small starvation period reduces anaesthetic risk. This is another benefit of bringing the horse to us.

Complications

The complication rate of castrations is high due to the delicacy of the area, and the nature of the operation. Infection of the operation site is a risk, which we try to minimise by operating in our theatre. Swelling and soreness are common transient nuisances. The scrotum (sac containing the testicles) does connect directly with the abdomen and hernias (intestine protruding in or through the

wound) post-castrations do occur. The colt will bleed a small amount at the time of castration and upon rising from the anaesthetic; however vast blood loss is a rare, but serious problem.

After the operation

After castration, going home instructions will be provided to help you. The colt cannot be turned out with mares for at least 3 weeks. After this the colt may still display the desire to mount mares, but cannot impregnate them.

After castration, a small area of turnout will be needed or else regular walking in hand will be necessary. A clean, well bedded stable is essential if the horse is stabled to avoid infection. Often forced exercise (lunging or other) can help to keep swelling to a minimum and to encourage drainage.

Please ring for a current quote if you have not already done so. These quotes are based on fully vaccinated animals with well descended testicles. One injection of painkiller and antibiotics is also included. If the colt needs further treatment this will be payable.