



A Guide To Gut Sounds (Borborygmi) And Gut Health

by Horse Education Online

Understanding the Horse's Gut

Horses are unique in their digestive anatomy and function, making gut health a critical aspect of their overall well-being. Understanding a horse's gut signs is essential for horse owners and professionals, as these indicators can reveal a lot about the animal's health and help prevent serious issues like colic, ulcers, or other gastrointestinal disorders.

Why Gut Health Matters

The horse's digestive system is designed for continuous grazing (over 16 hours of grazing per day), with a delicate balance of microbial populations in the hindgut to aid fermentation and digestion.

Disruptions to this system can quickly escalate to severe health problems. Monitoring gut health and recognizing abnormal signs allows for early intervention, reducing the risk of life-threatening conditions.

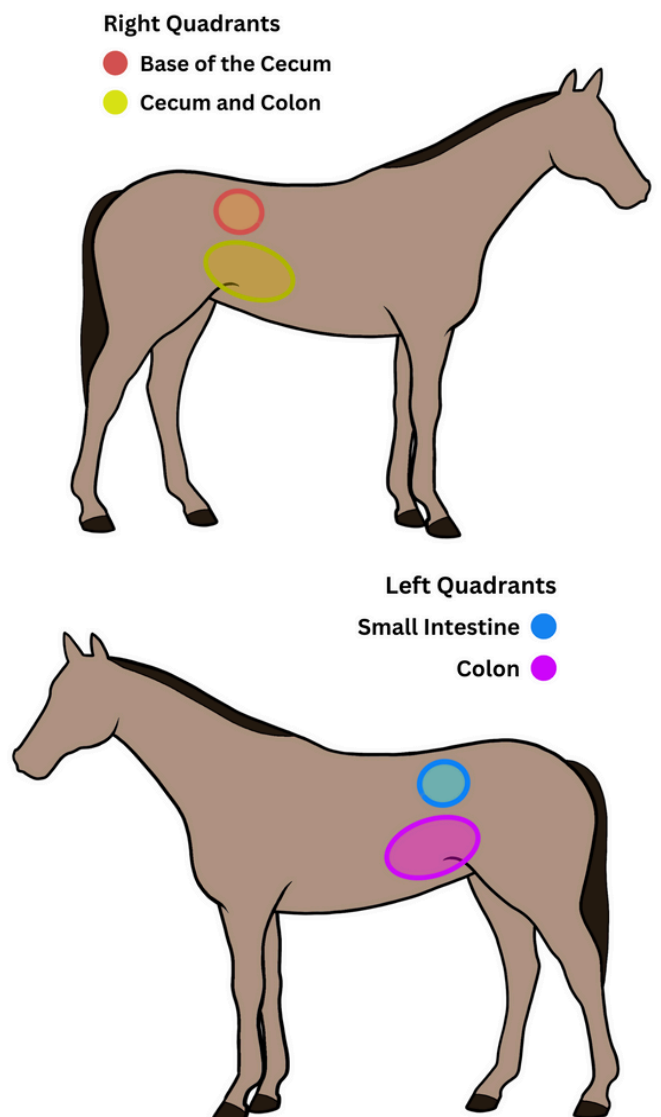
Normal Gut Sounds In Horses

To assess a horse's gut health, familiarize yourself with what is normal for that individual. Here are the primary indicators:

1. Gut Sounds (Borborygmi)

Gut sounds, or borborygmi, are the noises produced by the movement of gas and fluid through the intestines. Healthy horses should have:

- Consistent gurgling, bubbling, or growling sounds (borborygmi) in all four quadrants of the abdomen (upper and lower left, upper and lower right).
- 1-3 Borborygmi per minute is considered normal.
- The upper quadrants tend to be quieter.



2. Appetite and Eating Habits

A horse with good gut health will:

- Eat consistently and enthusiastically.
- Show no signs of discomfort or selective feeding.
- Maintain regular grazing or feeding patterns.

3. Manure Production

Normal manure is an excellent indicator of digestive health. Look for:

- Firm, moist, well-formed fecal balls with a grassy or earthy odor.
- Regular manure production, typically 8-12 piles per day, depending on the horse's size and diet.
- Abnormalities such as diarrhea, dry feces, or undigested feed can signal issues.

4. Hydration Levels

Dehydration can impact gut function. Check for:

- Moist mucous membranes (gums) and a capillary refill time of 1-2 seconds.
- Adequate water intake, typically 5-15 gallons per day depending on the horse's size, diet, and environment.

Abnormal Gut Signs To Watch Out For

Recognizing early warning signs of gut issues can prevent serious complications. Be alert to:

1. Reduced or Absent Gut Sounds

- Quiet or silent quadrants may indicate a blockage or impaction.
- Less than 1 borborygmus per minute indicates that the portion of the gut you are listening to is "Hypomotile", meaning that there is poor gut movement and there may be an obstruction

2. Excessive Gut Sounds

- More than 3 borborygmi per minute indicate a "Hypermotile" gut. This means that the horse may be experiencing a stomach upset, such as diarrhea.
- Loud, excessive sounds could also signal gas buildup or hypermotility.

3. Changes In Appetite

- Refusal to eat, slow eating, or sudden disinterest in feed in a normally "food motivated" horse may signal discomfort or illness.

4. Irregular, Abnormal, Or Lack of Manure

- Diarrhea may indicate infections, parasites, or dietary changes.
- Dry, hard manure suggests dehydration or impaction.
- Horses should pass manure 8 to 12 times per day. Prolonged constipation, especially if accompanied by other signs of discomfort, such as refusal to eat or drink, should warrant a call to a veterinarian.

5. Signs of Colic

- Any of the symptoms previously described, paired with pawing, rolling, sweating, and looking at the flanks are classic symptoms.
- Reduced manure production, bloating, or unusual posture should be taken seriously.

When To Call A Veterinarian

Immediate veterinary attention is needed if you observe:

- Persistent gut sounds paired with very watery diarrhea
- Absent gut sounds.
- Severe or prolonged signs of colic.
- Sudden changes in manure production or appetite.
- Excessive sweating, rapid breathing, or other signs of distress while the horse has been at rest.