

W R E X H A M
V E T E R I N A R Y C A R E



AT THE MALT HOUSE

Castrations

Castrations are performed for a number of reasons, most commonly for management purposes, as castrated animals tend to be easier to handle and rear. The decision on when and how a castration is performed are dependent on the age, breed, facilities available and the degree of handling the horse has had.

Horses can be castrated at almost any age but is most commonly done between 7 months to 2 years of age. Some people decide to castrate animals over the age of 3-4 years old, this carries an increased risk of complications and although can be done standing is advised to be done in a surgical theatre.

The majority of castrations are performed by an 'open' technique, in which the incisions are not sutured closed, but are allowed to drain. This clean technique is suitable to be performed in a clean stable or field and is therefore the most common method used, often being done in late autumn or early spring when there are fewer flies.

It seems odd not to suture the wound closed, but in open castrations total sterility can not be guaranteed. Closing the incision and therefore not allowing drainage can mean the sutures act as a focus for infection. 'Closed' castrations (where the incision is sutured) are commonly used for older animals or in horses at risk (i.e. those with retained testicles/undescended testicles or animals with palpable hernias), these need to be done in a sterile theatre and therefore carry a substantially higher cost and have the risk of a full general anaesthetic.

After the castration, the incision needs to be kept clean, it is normal to have a small amount of swelling post operatively which increases for the first 3-4 days and then should reduce. The castrated animal should be given a controlled exercise either by hand walking, a horse walker or small paddock turn out under observation. Failure to do so can result in increased swelling, reduced drainage and an increased risk of infection. Antibiotics are given before the operation and post operatively, along with anti-inflammatory/pain killer drugs for 4-5 days.

It is imperative that your horse is protected against tetanus, this can be done by preferably vaccinating prior to castration (giving 2 vaccination 2-3 weeks apart) or by giving an 'anti toxin', at the time of the castration.

Castrations are a routine procedure, but complications can occur. These range from mild infections to more serious complications such as evisceration (herniation of intestine) of the intestine, deep infections or peritonitis (abdominal infection). Haemorrhage (bleeding) post castration is an obvious concern but is very rarely a problem; a slow drip is normal for a few hours post castration. In very rare occasions haemorrhage can be a serious problem, and therefore close observation post operatively and calling the practice if you are concerned, as early intervention or reassurance can be given as required.

The treatment of castration complications can be time consuming and costly and the relative risks can be discussed with our vets prior to the castration.