Other parameters that your veterinarian may do would include the passing of a nasogastric tube and a rectal examination. The nasogastric tube is a hollow soft plastic tube that is passed up the nasal passages, down the esophagus and into the stomach. If there is excessive gas in the stomach, a gush of odiferous air may be released. Sometimes it is important to drain the stomach of any excess fluid that has accumulated. This is accomplished by trying to create a siphon. The amount of fluid that is refluxed and its color are important clues to the cause of the problem.

The rectal examination is important for examining the internal abdomen. Your veterinarian is familiar with the normal internal anatomy and is feeling for bowel that is abnormally positioned or increased in size. The rectal is very helpful in most cases when determining whether the problem can be treated medically or surgically.

In cases that are more difficult to diagnose, additional tests can be done. A complete blood count and a serum chemistry profile can be use to assess the infectious and metabolic status of the horse. An abdominocentesis (a procedure where a needle or blunt cannula are inserted through the abdominal wall to collect a sample of the fluid that is in the abdomen) will help to decide whether there is compromised bowel. In colics due to twists or strangulation of the blood supply to a part of the intestine, the character of the fluid surrounding the intestines changes. The protein content and the white blood cells usually increase. A reddish tinge to the fluid indicates red cell leakage from the blood vessels.

X-rays of the adult horse’s abdomen is difficult due to its size and density. In cases where an intestinal stone or enterolith are suspected, x-rays using a powerful machine may be beneficial. Foal abdomens are fairly easy to radiograph.

Gastric ulcers are being diagnosed more frequently in the last few years. A definitive diagnosis can be made using a two-meter long endoscope. The horse is starved for 24-48 hours in order to empty the stomach. Even so, there is often ingesta still present obscuring some part of the stomach wall.