Follow-up Care

 

Care after the surgery is extremely important, especially if the skin incisions are left open to heal on their own. The horse should rest quietly in his stall for 24 hours following castration. After that time, however, it is imperative that he has exercise for at least one hour every day. Frequently, people make the mistake of turning the horse out in a paddock or pasture.

Many times, the horse, especially if he is a little sore, will just stand quietly and graze. Castrated horses need exercise to keep their incisions draining appropriately. Therefore, they need to be longed or chased!

If they are not exercised appropriately, then the skin incisions can close prematurely, and the area can become very swollen, painful, and infected. Daily cold water hosing also helps keep the swelling down and will help clean the incisions.

In most horses, the effects of the residual testosterone in the horse’s body will last approximately six weeks. So unfortunately, you will not see an immediate attitude adjustment in unruly horses. For this reason, I recommend not turning out your new gelding with mares or any other horses until six weeks after castration. He can’t impregnate your mare during that time, but he might get hurt when he mounts her uninvited.

**The “Proud-Cut” Myth**

Geldings which continue to mount mares or those which have continued aggressive behaviour following castration are often referred to as being “proud cut.” This term has been used to imply that the castration was not completely performed (intentionally or unintentionally), and that a portion of a testicle or epididymis was left in the horse and is still producing hormones (particularly testosterone) that cause stallion-like behaviour. If a portion of the epididymis was left in the horse, it would not cause the horse to continually act like a stallion as the epididymis cannot produce testosterone on its own.

If you have a “gelding” which acts like a stallion, there are two possibilities.

Problem 1: The horse might have a cryptorchid testicle that is retained high in the flank or in the abdomen that still is producing testosterone and creating the stallion-like behaviour. The testicle was not found during a normal castration, and the entire testicle or a major portion of it was left in the horse.

Solution: Your veterinarian can take blood samples to determine if your horse is producing testosterone at similar levels to a stallion. A baseline blood sample is taken, then a hormone (hCG–human chorionic gonadotropin) is administered and will stimulate testosterone production if the horse has functional testicular tissue in his body. This is one of the best ways to determine if a horse has a cryptorchid testicle hidden somewhere.

Problem 2: Your horse is a true gelding with no testosterone-producing tissue in his body (i.e., no testicular tissue) and still displays stallion-like behaviour, possibly due to learned behaviour. On the other hand, in one study in which male horses’ behaviour was evaluated following castration, there was no significant difference in behaviour whether the horses were castrated at less than two years of age or at more than three years of age. Regardless of the age at which they were castrated, up to 30% of the horses still displayed stallion-like behaviour, including aggression toward other horses. The study noted that 5% of the horses displayed aggression toward humans.

Solution: Most veterinarians believe that in true geldings, appropriate training can reduce or eliminate the stallion-like behaviour. Luckily, most castrations in horses are performed with no complications, and a healthy, well-adjusted gelding is the result.

 