

WHEN TO CASTRATE

by Dr. Laura Harris

When to castrate? The decision for an individual colt depends on many factors including, but not limited to: 1) age 2) personality 3) individual health 4) intended use 5) time of year 6) training program for the colt.

1) Many colts intended for personal use are castrate in their first year – usually during their first winter or the spring of their yearling year. The remaining colts in this group that are not intended for reproductive use are castrated in the fall of their yearling year or in the spring of their two year old year.

2) Any colt that becomes aggressive or dangerous to humans or other animals (or to himself) is a serious candidate for immediate castration. The owner or handler should carefully weigh the risks involved in the aggressive individual remaining intact versus any benefits inherent in remaining a stallion. An aggressive colt that remains intact may need to move to a specialized training facility.

3) Any colt scheduled for castration surgery should be in good general health, should be current on all recommended vaccinations, and should have been dewormed effectively. In addition, for castration surgery on the farm the colt should have two testicle descended into the normal position in the scrotum. If a colt has one or two testicles retained in the abdomen (monorchid or cryptorchid) most veterinarians will elect to refer the surgery to a hospital where gas anesthesia and sterile surgery facilities are available. (Remember, a monorchid or cryptorchid castration surgery involves opening the abdomen.)

4) Obviously, if a colt's career options include show or racing competition as a stallion, or if he is destined to be a breeding animal, castration is not going to be scheduled. If his behavior becomes difficult, there are some medications that can be used to modify sexual aggression. None of these medications are as effective as castration in eliminating sexual aggression. NEVER use acepromazine tranquilizer in an intact stallion.

5) In Arizona, scheduling of a farm (at home) castration should be done when the daytime temperatures are below 95-100 degrees to decrease environmental stress on the post surgery patient. Regardless, the patient will require post surgical monitoring for 12 to 24 hours and will require daily forced exercise for approximately ten days after castration. (See castration aftercare article on this website.) When scheduling a castration surgery, please take into consideration the caretakers' work / travel schedule during the ten days after surgery.

6) The surgical colt must be trained well enough to be caught, haltered, held and led before surgery. These basics will make castration a safer procedure for both

the colt and the handler. If the colt is already in training he can actually be ridden 48 hours after surgery.

On farm (at home) castration is a routine procedure that we often assume will go smoothly. Planning ahead when scheduling castration will help ensure that the surgery and aftercare will be uneventful.