

HOOF CARE IS A CRITICAL PART OF EQUINE HEALTH

There's an old saying among horse people: "No foot, no horse." A horse's entire weight, often more than 1,000 lbs, is supported by four relatively small feet. Without healthy feet, a horse is in trouble.

The Difference Between a Hoof and a Foot

Foot refers to the hoof and all its internal structures including bones and sensitive structures. Hoof is only the hard outside covering of the foot including the wall, the sole and the frog. The hoof has no blood supply or nerves.

Inside the hoof are the sensitive structures which produce and nourish the hoof and attach it to the bones of the foot.

Most foot problems can be avoided with proper care. Keep your horse on clean, dry footing, feed him/her properly, pick out his/her feet on a regular basis, and have his/her hooves trimmed or shod regularly by a competent farrier. Protect his/her feet with properly fitted shoes and pads if necessary.

The vision of the Alberta SPCA is that every animal in Alberta be treated humanely.

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HOOF CARE FOR HORSES & PONIES



NECESSARY HOOF CARE FOR HORSES

Cleaning

A hoofpick is probably the most important tool in a grooming kit. Always clean your horse's hooves before and after riding. Whether or not they are ridden, horses kept in stalls or confined areas should have their hooves picked out daily to prevent thrush. Horses on pasture should have their feet cleaned periodically.

COMMON HOOF PROBLEMS

Thrush & Canker

Thrush is an infection of the frog. Canker (hoof rot) is an infection of the whole foot. You'll recognize both from a foul odour and discharge from the disintegrating frog. Both are caused by keeping a horse in wet, dirty conditions.

If you find your horse is starting a thrush infection, you can treat it with brush-on medications available in tack stores. For more advanced cases, consult your veterinarian or farrier.

Cracks

Cracks in the hoof wall can start at the bottom and go up, or at the top and go down. The seriousness depends on how deep it goes and where it's located. If the crack is deep enough that it bleeds, infection is likely.

Cracks that start at the top of the foot are due to disturbances in hoof growth resulting from coronet injuries such as wire cuts. Cracks that start at the bottom are caused by dry or thin hoof walls, or by improper trimming. Serious cracks may require corrective shoeing.

Shoeing

Horses doing a lot of work or working on hard ground will need to be shod to help protect their hooves. Some horses with weak hoof walls, flat soles, or other problems might also need shoes, even if they're not working. Consult your farrier or veterinarian for advice.

Shoes need to be reset every six to eight weeks. Leaving them on too long can damage the hoof. If a shoe comes loose without coming off completely, it can also injure the horse. Note: Never pull off a loose shoe without cutting off the clinched end of the horse shoe nail first.

Corns & Bruised Sole

Corns are caused by constant, small repeated pressures to a part of the foot. Common causes are a poor shoeing job or shoes that have been left on too long.

Bruises are caused by a single, traumatic blow to the foot, such as stepping on a piece of gravel. Bruising is more likely to happen if the horse has naturally flat soles, or if the sole and frog have been pared too thin in trimming.

If the bruise or corn has not abscessed, removing the cause of the problem is usually the only treatment required. If your horse bruises easily, he/she may need protective shoes and pads.

Laminitis or Founder

Laminitis, commonly called founder, is an acutely painful inflammation of the foot. It occurs most often in the front feet, although it can affect the hind feet as well. The most common cause is overeating.

Trimming

Like our fingernails, a horse's hooves grow continuously. They need to be trimmed every six to eight weeks to keep them in proper shape.

Trimming is a job for a trained farrier. An inexperienced person can easily trim the hoof wall too short or pare too much sole, causing the horse to be sore. More important, the hoof must be balanced precisely to the horse's natural way of going, or he or she is going to end up lame. The skill required to keep a hoof properly balanced takes a lot of training and practice to develop. In the long run, it's cheaper to pay for a good farrier than risk harming your horse.

Seedy Toe

Seedy toe is a separation of the hoof wall from the white line in the toe region, causing a hole between the hoof wall and the sensitive laminae. The outside of the hoof wall looks sound, but the inside becomes crumbly.

Poor foot care is the most common cause. Seedy toe is easily caused when the hoof wall is allowed to grow too long. It also commonly occurs with chronic laminitis.

Abscesses

If your horse suddenly goes dead lame on one foot, an abscess is the most probable cause. It could be caused by a puncture wound or by a corn or bruise.

Your veterinarian will drain the abscess and prescribe follow-up treatment. The vet will likely give the horse a tetanus shot.