



**RESPONSIBLE
HORSE OWNER BOOKLET**

CARING FOR YOUR HORSE'S FEET





INTRODUCTION



Hoof care is an extremely important aspect of horse ownership but is also an area that can get overlooked in a busy day-to-day schedule.

The old saying 'No foot, No horse' still holds true today and whilst as an owner you cannot do much mechanically to the foot, daily care and observation are vital to avoiding potentially serious and life threatening problems.

This guide is part of a series covering a range of different topics to help you keep your horses healthy.

For more information and to gain access to the rest of the series, please visit our website:

www.healthyhorses.co.uk



BASIC ROUTINE HOOF CARE

Who should maintain my horse's feet?

On a daily basis you are the best person to take care of your horse's hooves, ensuring they are clean and free from sharp objects such as stones. Getting to know what is normal for your horse will help you to spot anything out of the ordinary, therefore enabling you to then take direct action to prevent potential problems in the future.

A qualified farrier needs to attend your horse to undertake trimming and if necessary, shoeing. In the United Kingdom, registered farriers are governed by the Farriers (Registration) Act 1975 and overseen by the Farriers Registration Council.



To find a registered farrier
in your area:

[Click here](#)

What routine checks do my horse's feet need?

If your horse is stabled it is imperative that bedding is kept clean and dry

- Allowing a horse to stand on dirty, wet bedding provides the ideal environment for bacteria to build up, which may affect the hoof structures, leading to common ailments such as thrush.

This condition affects the frog, producing a black, foul smelling, soft and often sore frog material. The bacteria commonly involved is anaerobic meaning it does not like oxygen hence the need to pick out the feet often, to allow oxygen to get to the underside of the hoof.

Cleaning and drying the hooves thoroughly is often enough to treat the condition and to prevent reoccurrence, however your farrier may have to remove badly damaged frog tissue and the area may need treating with a topical medication.

Feet should be picked out once daily as a minimum

- Your horse should not find it uncomfortable when you pick out his feet applying firm pressure down the side of the frog. If he does, it can be an indication of a problem like thrush.
- Picking out the feet is important in many ways and provides a vital opportunity to closely inspect all the hoof structures. The frog should be regularly inspected for damage and cuts and for conditions like thrush. In turn, the sole should be examined for puncture wounds and cuts and stones wedged beside the frog. The wall needs to be inspected for excessive growth or excessive wear and the white line should be checked to ensure it is free from trapped grit which may cause an opportunity for an infection if not discovered in time.
- If your horse has been living out in damp muddy conditions and then brought in to a stable, perhaps overnight, it is important to pick out his feet, not only to check for stones but also to remove the wet mud trapped in the under side of the hoof. Should mud and stones be allowed to remain in place it will keep the sole and frog damp for an extended period of time. This results in the horn structures becoming soft and potentially not as resilient as they should be.

BASIC ROUTINE HOOF CARE

What routine checks do my horse's feet need?

Check the condition of shoes

- If shoes are fitted, assess their wear after two to three weeks according to workload. If they are worn significantly, then the next shoeing appointment should be moved forward or the work load on abrasive surfaces should be reduced, to avoid shoes becoming loose or moving on the foot before the farrier's regular visit.

-
- Shoes should also be regularly checked for any movement on the foot, as when horses move freely it is usual for them to catch their shoes. Typically, horses will often catch the front shoes with their hind ones and either lose them completely or bend one heel. This could result in the nails in the shoe being trodden back again which may puncture the sole.

-
- If a punctured sole is suspected, veterinary advice should be sought immediately as any puncture wound can be problematic. Additionally, a deep puncture within the middle area of the hoof can be potentially fatal, if not dealt with immediately.
-

Check the digital pulse

- Feeling your horse's digital pulses is a very useful way of assessing conditions that may be occurring within the feet, however they are of little help if you do not know what they feel like when everything is ok. It does take a little practice, but as you will be picking your horse's feet up every day you will soon get the hang of it.

One of the best places to find them is the inside and outside of the fetlock joint, slightly towards the back. Use your forefinger and with gentle pressure keep your fingers still and wait.

A horse's pulse is slow at rest and often the fingers are moved away too quickly. Once you know what is normal for your horse you will be able to tell your horse's veterinary surgeon, or farrier what is abnormal if they ask.

PREPARING FOR THE FARRIER

Discuss any concerns with your farrier.

In order for a farrier to be able to provide the best level of care for your horse, you should ensure that you have adequately prepared both your horse and the shoeing area prior to their arrival. Your duty of care will be to provide:

- **A clean, dry standing area with good light and a non-slip surface**
- **A secure, safe ring to which the horse can be tied**
- **Protection from rain, wind and bad weather**
- **A properly fitted, sound head collar/halter with a good rope of adequate length**
- **Competent assistance should the farrier require it**

It is important that your horse is used to being handled and is happy to have its feet lifted and held. If your horse resents this then you will need to spend time training your horse to accept this type of procedure. You should discuss any concerns you might have with your farrier, ideally prior to their visit, or your vet who will be able to give advice on an appropriate course of action.



Routine farrier visits.

How often does my horse need its feet trimming?

It is difficult to put a time frame on the length of time a horse may go between trimmings, as there are many factors relating to growth and wear to the hoof. However, the usual range is between 4 and 8 weeks depending on these factors.

The best policy is to ensure you put in place a regular visit from your chosen farrier as this will often prevent problems from occurring in the first place. It will also allow you to budget for regular visits, rather than emergency ones!

Does my horse need shoes?

Horses have survived for thousands of years without shoes, and still can, however much depends on their breed type, the conditions they are kept in and the surfaces they are worked on.

There are only three reasons for horses to wear shoes:

- 1. To prevent excessive wearing of the wall and sole when moving on abrasive surfaces such as tarmac and concrete**
- 2. To enhance performance, whether for grip, the horse's action or protection from injury**
- 3. To effect a change to the hoof or to provide therapy to the foot, limb or body, or to compensate for conformational defects**

If your horse does not fit into these categories it should be questioned whether he needs to be shod and in many cases it is not unreasonable to have just front shoes fitted. All horses are individuals so it is best to discuss their specific needs with your farrier on a regular basis.

Regardless of whether your horse is shod or unshod you should have an understanding of his feet and become familiar with his individual hoof conformation.

Should you have any concerns, the best person to help is your horse's farrier who should be only too willing to discuss issues on one of their routine visits or over the telephone if you feel the problem is more urgent.

FAQs

Keeping my horse's feet clean.

Should I wash my horse's feet?

Mud is always a battle in the winter and when horses have to stand in it daily it can cause many issues. It is best in most cases to wipe the feet clean with absorbent material rather than washing, but if washing is the only way to rid the feet of mud, make sure they are thoroughly dried afterwards. You wouldn't wash your hands or feet without drying them as your skin would crack and become rough. Hooves are similar, in that if the horn structure (specifically the horn tubules) becomes oversaturated for long periods of time, its strength is compromised, which ultimately leads to broken and weak hoof walls.

Once the hooves are clean and dry a hoof dressing can be applied if required. There are many on the market and again your farrier is best placed to advise you on your horse's individual requirements.

Are my horse's feet too dry?

Hoof horn is usually at its toughest when moisture content is low. As hooves get wetter, the horn becomes softer and more vulnerable. It is rare in the UK for hoof structures to become too hard, so if the walls are cracking and splitting it is probably as a result of other issues. 'Watering' feet has no benefit at all and will compound problems. A regular application of a recommended conditioning product is more favourable and again your farrier is best placed to advise on this.



FAQs

What should I do if my horse goes lame?

- If your horse goes lame, contact your veterinary surgeon or farrier for advice
- There are many potential reasons for a horse going lame but it is worth remembering that a large percentage of lamenesses are in the foot
- If your horse goes lame immediately after shoeing it may be due to incorrect nail positioning and as such you should contact your farrier to re-examine your horse
- If you find that your horse has trodden on a nail or something similar, and is lame, you should contact your vet immediately and leave the nail in place until they arrive
- A deep puncture within the middle area of the hoof can be potentially fatal, if not dealt with immediately
- You should ensure that your horse is fully vaccinated against tetanus as the bacteria that cause the disease are found in the soil and enter the body through wounds, commonly to the sole of the foot



WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?

Check list.

- Make sure you clean out and examine your horse's feet at least once daily
- Make sure your horse is registered with a qualified farrier
- Ensure you have somewhere suitable (safe and light) for your farrier to work
- Check that your horse is up to date with their tetanus vaccination

Where can I go for further information?

- **Your vet**
- **Your farrier**
- **To find a vet in your area**
[Click here](#)
- **To find a registered farrier in your area**
[Click here](#)
- **For more information on daily hoof care from World Horse Welfare youtube channel**
[Click here](#)





MSD

Animal Health

**Further information
is available from:**

MSD Animal Health
Walton Manor
Walton
Milton Keynes MK7 7AJ

Tel. 01908 685 685

www.msd-animal-health.co.uk
www.healthyhorses.co.uk

Keeping Britain's Horses Healthy logo is property of MSD Animal Health.
A subsidiary of Merck & Co. Whitehouse Station, NJ, USA.