

Q&A

HORSECARE

OUR EXPERT PANEL



THOMAS RIGHTON
Vet Thomas works at Hook Norton Veterinary Group, a member of XL Equine. He has a special interest in orthopaedic work, lameness and wound management.



STEPH SOSKIN
Steph is an experienced BHSII instructor and competes regularly in showing. She is the co-author of *What Not to Wear on a Horse*.



JUSTINE SOLE
Justine is an instructor at AM Dressage in Gloucestershire, home of Adam Kemp and Matt Frost. She competes up to Grand Prix level in dressage.

Is strapping beneficial?

Several years ago, strapping horses was a common practice. We had a large leather pad that we used on the horses' muscles along the top of the neck and the hindquarters to build topline. This practice seems to have died out. Why is this and is strapping beneficial?

Clare Elliott, by email

JUSTINE SAYS Strapping is an old fashioned method of equine massage. It is designed to develop the muscle tone, stimulate the blood and circulation and bring a shine to the horse's coat.

It was usual to incorporate it with a full groom, either by using a hay wisp, a leather massage pad or a folded stable rubber.

It should be done on the main muscle areas, such as the top of the neck and hindquarters.

Strapping is carried out by raising your hand so the horse can see the pad and then bringing

it down hard on the muscle, followed by stroking the muscle with the other hand.

The horse will tense the muscle, which helps to tone it.

With an unfit horse that has never been strapped before, start gently by stroking the pad over the muscle.

There are now lots of modern methods of massage for the horse, in the form of massage pads and full body massage machines. These, of course, have their benefits but can be an expensive way of doing something that you can do yourself by strapping.

Some say this type of massage is uncomfortable for the horse because you are banging his body. However it is highly beneficial, cheap and effective.

Most horses really enjoy it, and by doing this you are also spending time with your horse.

You will benefit too, as strapping is a great way to tone up your arms!



Strapping can improve a horse's muscle tone

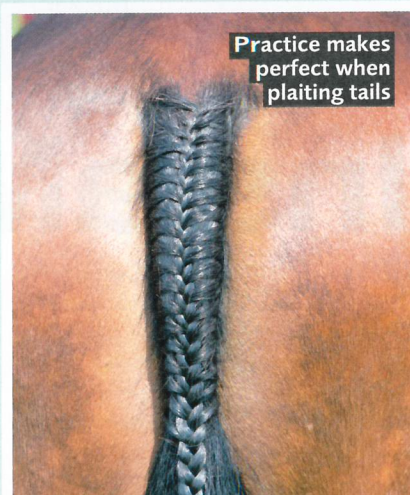
Tail plaiting tips

No matter how hard I try, I can't plait a horse's tail. How can I achieve a neat look? My plaits are wonky with hairs sticking out all over the place.

Sarah Carter, Doncaster, South Yorks

STEPH SAYS This really is down to practice, when there is no pressure on and you are not in a rush.

To enable you to plait tidily, the tail needs to be clean, but not just washed. There



Practice makes perfect when plaiting tails

should be some grease in it, so don't use a conditioning spray, or the hair will slip through your fingers.

The tail should be full (not pulled) and you need to work with small sections of hair.

To start, dampen the hair thoroughly. Then take a small section of hair from each side at the top of the tail.

Keeping the tension of the hair taut, cross the right piece of hair over the left. Then take a third section from the left side and cross it over. You now have three strands to plait with.

Repeat this step down the tail, taking small widths of hair from alternative sides.

Finish by plaiting down the long length of hair that remains in your hand. Secure the end with thread or a small band, loop it back underneath itself and sew it in place.



Lice tend to occur in long-coated horses

TIP from the TOP

If your horse or pony suffers from sweet itch, start your prevention plan early to offer relief from bites and irritation.

The effects of pain

I hear about horses bucking or becoming difficult to ride if they are in pain, but can the opposite happen? My pony has become very lethargic, having previously been keen and forward going.

Name and address withheld

THOMAS SAYS Pain shows up in different ways. Conditions such as osteoarthritis can present with a horse which is stiff and reluctant to work or perform specific movements. Mild to moderate front limb or foot lameness, such as navicular syndrome,

Why is he so itchy?

My new horse gets itchy along the midline of his belly. He gets down on the floor and rubs his chest and stomach along the ground. He doesn't get itchy on his mane and tail, like sweet itch sufferers. I've never seen anything like this before. Can you help?

Alison Davies, Horsham, West Sussex

THOMAS SAYS Insect bite allergies can present in a variety of ways. The most common is itchy mane and tails, as seen in horses with sweet itch.

That said, midge and fly bites to the sensitive skin on the belly can also cause itching.

I would firstly suggest using a good quality fly rug, which has a belly cover. You should also regularly apply insect repellent, to help keep biting insects away.

A lice infestation can also cause itchiness. These parasites can be found in long-coated horses during the winter.

To check for lice and lice eggs you need to part the hair. Lice are about 2mm long and are visible to the naked eye.

Allergies to shampoos or cleaning products do occur but are not very common. Try and recall any new products you have used recently, though, which could have caused irritation.

Grooming a sensitive horse

I own a mud monster that has a very ticklish belly. Can you suggest a good way of getting the dirt off such a sensitive part of his body?

Morag Smith, by email

STEPH SAYS Choose your grooming brushes carefully if your horse is sensitive.

If he has a full coat, a not-too-hard dandy brush or rubber curry comb could be used. You can still remove mud, even when gently using this type of brush.

Use softer bristles when grooming sensitive areas if your horse is clipped.

It would help you and your horse to avoid mud sticking to him in the first place. Rugs with belly flaps are useful, or you could give him a spritz with coat conditioner before riding and turning out.

I spray my horses' tummies, elbows and legs with coat conditioner and I find the mud slides off easily.



A rubber curry comb can be used gently to remove mud



Your vet can check for subtle lameness

can also lead to a horse feeling potterly and lethargic.

I would advise getting your horse examined by your vet to check for subtle lameness. He can also listen to his heart for any abnormalities or cardiovascular problems such as heart murmurs and arrhythmia.

If he's sound and the heart is normal, discuss taking a blood sample to check for other medical causes.

There are many illnesses which could lead to lethargy, such as liver disease, infections, anaemia, high worm burdens, and Cushing's syndrome.

Any change in a horse's demeanour and behaviour could be a symptom of an underlying issue.