

# Treat foot pain in horses quickly to avoid lameness

If a horse has a foot pain, it usually means it will go lame. Looking out for signs of lameness and treating the condition as soon as possible are vital to prevent the animal from suffering.

## How will I know if my horse has foot pain?

Pain in the foot usually causes lameness. Lameness can be anything from a non-weight-bearing limb to a



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## VETERINARY ADVICE

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subtle head nod which might only be noticeable at trot. You might also notice a change in stance, such as leaning back on the heels.

## What should I do if I think my horse has foot pain?

Getting your vet to examine your horse is the first step. Some of the common problems are quickly diagnosed and dealt with but, if left too long, can have serious consequences.

## What are the causes of sore feet?

The most common causes of foot pain are: foot abscess, bruised sole and laminitis. Abscesses are the most common cause of sudden onset lameness in the horse. Pus builds up under the sole which causes an

increase in pressure. This is like getting a splinter under your finger nail. The signs can range from subtle to severe lameness and, in some cases, pus discharges from the hoof or coronary band.

Bruised soles are generally caused by the horse standing on a stone or other hard object, but can also be caused by poorly shod feet or too much work on hard surfaces, particularly in unshod horses.

Laminitis is inflammation of the laminae, which are the delicate folds of tissue which suspends the pedal bone in the hoof. This can be caused by too much grass or grain, obesity, post-foaling problems, severe infections, Cushing's disease, stress, cold weather and drugs.

## There are many more causes of foot pain. How can it be treated?

Pus in the foot requires removal of the shoe and paring of the sole until the abscess is found to establish drainage. A poultice is then applied to the foot and changed regularly.

A protective bandage needs to be applied until the wound has healed sufficiently. This stops any dirt getting in to the sensitive tissue.

A bruised sole is treated by paring the area of sole, which is bruised, so that it is no longer bearing weight. A bruised sole will often heal very quickly as long as the horse is kept off rough uneven ground and has its feet attended to regularly.

Treatment of laminitis involves avoiding predisposing factors, such as lush spring grass, testing for and treating Cushing's, or initiating a weight loss program in the obese horse.

Supporting the foot during episodes of laminitis is also essential. This can be achieved by providing a deep bed or in more extreme cases, the use of frog supports. The use of Bute pain killer anti-inflammatory can also help to relieve symp-



**PAINFUL:** A foot abscess that has been pared out to release the pus, above, and a poultice dressing is applied to the foot, below

toms.

## What can I do to avoid foot pain?

A good farrier will help avoid a lot of problems with overgrowth and imbalances, so get your farrier to trim your horses feet regularly.

Keeping your horse in good general health and adjusting diet and exercise appropriately will also benefit feet. In horses with problem feet, the use of a supplement containing biotin and methionine can help improve new horn growth.



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