

VET DIARY

Treating wounds

Our vet columnist Nicola Thompson shares some tips for managing wounds

This month I want to talk about wounds, which are one of the most common reasons for a vet call out.

Horses have a knack of walking into wire fences, getting kicked or suffering puncture wounds from all kinds of things.

There are also vital structures, such as tendons and joints, which have very little covering them. So even a small wound has the potential to cause serious problems.

A worrying turn

I was called out to see a lovely two-year-old Quarter Horse-cross mare called Honey.

Her owner, Emily, is an experienced horsewoman who has dealt with many wounds, both minor and extensive, sometimes with veterinary help.

Honey had suffered a small wound on her right fore, on the outside of the leg about 15cm above her knee. We suspect it was caused by a kick from a field mate.

The wound was small and had barely broken the skin, so Emily was not concerned.

However, four days later the leg became swollen and painful to touch, and there was discharge from above the initial injury site.

It was at this point I was called out to take a look at the wound.

The mare was out in the field and it was getting dark, but of course these conditions don't often stop a vet!

As the photo on the right shows, there was a swelling just above the wound, and this was where the discharge was coming from.

When Honey was kicked, the impact caused a haematoma, which is where blood collects around a trauma. In Honey's case, it formed over the few days following the kick.

This pocket of blood caused swelling and inflammation. As the discharge was mostly tissue, fluid and blood, I did not think it was an abscess.



OUR EXPERT

Nicola Thompson is a qualified vet who works for Wright & Moreton in Cheshire, a member practice of XL Equine. A keen rider, she has a 16.3hh warmblood called Frazer, on loan.



The impact of the kick caused a haematoma

Keep an eye out for these as they can develop problems days after the initial injury, as happened in Honey's case.

If in doubt speak to your vet – we often get best results if we see difficult wounds early on.

Basic first aid is important to remove dirt, but don't pull out anything stuck in a wound.

“Infections are common as horses rarely cut themselves on something clean”

We clipped the area and cleaned and flushed the pocket. I also gave Honey painkillers and antibiotics, as it was infected.

To reduce contamination of the wound, and make it easier to treat her, Emily moved Honey to a yard where she could be stabled.

Four days after I first saw her, the mare was doing well with the swelling reduced and the wound closed.

She had a final check-up a week later and was sound, with no pain or swelling.

Be vigilant

It is common for owners to call us out to assess wounds, both fresh injuries and those not healing as they should.

Even with minor wounds, infections are common as horses rarely cut themselves on something clean.

If deeper structures become infected, such as joints or tendons, it is more urgent your horse sees a vet. A delay in treatment could mean permanent damage.

Not every scratch needs medical help, but wounds that are over joints or causing lameness or swelling may need attention.

If it's bleeding heavily, try to apply pressure – even putting on layers of stable bandages can help.

Most importantly, don't get kicked doing it. Even the best-behaved horses can be unpredictable, especially when hurt. I have had a few horses kick out when injured, including my own.

If you do call a vet, don't apply any creams or sprays before they arrive. Just flush the wound with salt water and keep it clean with a light dressing if necessary.

When a wound worsens after the initial injury, you should call a vet. This may indicate the start of a complication, which is likely to require treatment.

In Honey's case, the wound would have taken a lot longer to heal and it could have formed into a painful abscess. ■

After treatment, the wound has closed and the swelling gone down



Next issue: Post-Christmas, our vet columnist Nicola discusses respiratory disease and how you can protect your horse's airways.