

# Solve filled legs - fast!

Finding your horse with swollen legs can be scary, but as expert vet Jane King explains, there's no need to panic as it's usually a pain-free and easily-resolvable condition



**OUR EXPERT**

**JANE KING** is an equine vet who deals with a huge range of horses and ponies at the Westmorland Veterinary Group in Cumbria, which is a member of the XLVets group. Find out more at [www.westmorland-vets.co.uk](http://www.westmorland-vets.co.uk) and [www.xlvets.co.uk](http://www.xlvets.co.uk)

**F**illed legs is the term often used to describe the swelling of a horse's legs, and although it can look alarming, it's usually painless and doesn't cause lameness. The swelling usually affects pairs of legs, most commonly the hind legs, and is often confined to the lower legs, but it can occasionally spread above the knees or hocks. With filled legs you can push against the dough-like swelling without hurting your horse, whereas if swelling is linked to an infected wound it can be painful to the touch and often presents with lameness.

The condition occurs when fluid accumulates in the limbs, usually due to the horse standing still for long periods, such as in the stable, as when a horse's feet hit the ground it acts like a pump and sends blood and lymphatic fluid from his legs back up into his body.

An imbalance between hard feed and exercise can also cause filled legs, so a horse that's eating lots of

carbohydrates while standing in would be more likely to develop it than one grazing in the field. It's also more common in older horses and finer types like Thoroughbreds than in ponies or cob/heavy types.

## How to solve the problem

If filled legs have been caused by inactivity, getting your horse moving will help reduce the swelling, so go for a walk in-hand, put him on the horse walker if you have one, turn him out or ride. If there's any lameness associated with the swelling, however, always call your vet.

Stable bandages can also help reduce swelling if you have to keep your horse



Using stable bandages can help prevent and resolve filled legs

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in, but you must always use lots of padding and be sure to use proper stable bandages, not elasticated bandages which can grip too firmly and cause problems of their own. Avoid rubbing by taking bandages off twice a day for at least a couple of hours each time, and give his legs a massage. Cold hosing can also help, as will jacuzzi or ice boots which cool his legs, and you should reduce his hard feed until the problem is resolved.

To help prevent filled legs in the future, avoid having your horse standing in for long periods wherever possible, use stable bandages to provide support if he must stay in, and on rest days consider leaving the cereal ration out of his feed. 🐾



**EXPERT TIP**

If you find your horse with swollen legs, it's vital you carefully check him for any wounds, as the swelling could be caused by an infection. This usually affects just one leg, not pairs, and can become serious very quickly so always call your vet immediately.



Ice boots or cold hosing will help reduce the swelling of filled legs



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