

Hygiene How To's

No matter what type of product you decide to use to tackle thrush and white line disease, cleaning the hoof properly first is essential.

Scrubbing with Bristle Brush and Liquid Dish Soap

One of the simplest, cheapest, and most effective ways to eradicate thrush and keep the frog healthy is hoof scrubbing using liquid dish soap. Any brand will do, and I have not found anti-bacterial soaps to be any more effective than good ol' original Dawn dish soap. Even if you plan to soak the hoof in chlorine dioxide solution, or treat with essential oils, the hoof should be thoroughly scrubbed first.

A bristle brush with a soap holding handle makes this process easy. You can do this in the washrack, or just fill a bucket with fresh, clean water and use a measuring cup for rinsing.

First, use your hoofpick to remove as much debris as you possibly can. Don't be shy about this, but be careful -- a horse with thrush may find it uncomfortable. Don't neglect dirt accumulated in the white line.

Now rinse the bottom of the foot thoroughly. At this point, you'll probably notice some dirt, pebbles, and manure that you've missed with your pick; use the pick again, and remove what you can. Rinse again. Now pick up your brush, dispense some soap, and start scrubbing. Rinse and scrub repeatedly, until the suds are clean and white. Rinse again, and make sure there's nothing more hiding down in the grooves that run along the sides of the frog, or in the central sulcus that runs up between the heel bulbs. The white line should be thoroughly cleaned as well. Once you're satisfied that the foot is clean enough to eat your lunch off of (I'm only sort of kidding here), make sure you've rinsed all of the soap off of the foot and anywhere else it might have gotten, and move on to the next hoof.

Protecting the Frog with Zinc Oxide

After hoof scrubbing, coating the frog, collateral grooves and central sulcus with 40% zinc oxide ointment (diaper ointment like Desitin) provides an effective protective barrier. Allow the hoof to dry for a minute after scrubbing before applying the zinc oxide. The ointment can also be applied into white line separation to discourage the abrasive action of sand or gravel from wearing the white line away.

Scrubbing the hoof and reapplying zinc oxide every 2 to 3 days seems to be sufficient in most cases.

Using Essential Oils to Combat Deep Central Sulcus Thrush

If the central sulcus of the frog is a deep crease that runs up between the heel bulbs, using essential oils will quickly help open the area and clear up the infection. After scrubbing the hoof, use your hoofpick to pack a cotton ball or some clean gauze into the crease, and then saturate the cotton ball with essential oils (lavendar, eucalyptus, and tea tree are the three I have had success with). Again, treatment every 2 - 3 days is probably adequate.

Chlorine Dioxide Soaking

For white line infection, or really advanced cases of thrush, soak with a chlorine dioxide solution. Both White Lightening and Oxine AH brands are effective. (See the "Hygiene" section at ThoughtfulHorseman.com [HERE](#) for more information on using these products and links for ordering.)

Once again, scrubbing the foot prior to soaking greatly increases the effectiveness of the treatment.

I prefer to use empty IV bags for soaking; they are durable enough to (usually) last through several soaks, providing the horse is standing on soft ground and not cement or gravel.

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Top Left, hoof scrubbing tools: a bucket, a sturdy hoof pick, measuring cup for rinsing, soap filled scrub brush.

Top Right, using the measuring cup to rinse the hoof with clean water.

Bottom Left, scrubbing with bristle brush and liquid dish soap.

Bottom Right, coating the frog, central sulcus, and collateral grooves with zinc oxide for protection.

Slide the bag over the clean hoof, and secure the bag with duct tape or vet wrap around the pastern. Leave just enough play in the tape so that you can pour the solution into the top of the bag. Fill the bag so that the entire hoof capsule is submerged, and soak for 20 - 45 minutes. Soaking several times per week is fine for severe infections, but be sure to rinse the hoof and hairline after soaking if soaking more than once per week.

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Packing the central sulcus with cotton or gauze and saturating with essential oils to combat deep central sulcus thrush.



Chlorine dioxide soaking using recycled IV bags secured with duct tape.