

ARE YOU READY? YOUR HORSE IS!



What You Need to Know About Hoof Abscesses

During the wet winter months, hoof abscesses are not uncommon. Horses with good, tight white line connection, adequate, uniform sole coverage, and otherwise healthy hoof structure are much less prone to abscessing. Obviously, punctures will be the exception to that statement. But short of damage caused by a foreign object, which can happen to any hoof, hoof form pathologies -- from heel contraction, to high heels, to thin soles, and everything in between -- can make the hoof a target for abscessing. Even slight white line separation or immature sole callous make the horse susceptible. Horses with laminitis of any degree are particularly at risk, and in fact, foundered horses will abscess frequently during the healing process, as the body works to remove dead/damaged tissue from the foot.

Wet weather amplifies the potential for abscesses. The softened hoof is much less resilient, and bacteria can easily find a fissure in the sole or white line. The softened, wet hoof is equally prone to stone bruises to the sole corium caused by stepping on a rock or other hard object in otherwise soft, muddy conditions; these bruises can easily turn into abscesses.

Generally speaking, if your horse goes suddenly, dramatically lame with no obvious heat or swelling in the limb, a hoof abscess is the most likely cause. Advice

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

What You Need to Know About Hoof Abscesses	1
Bermuda Hay Facts	2
Heel Height 101	3
How Long to New Hooves?	4
Meet the Herd	5
About Maria / Contact Us	7

regarding treatment is often conflicting: some vets and farriers insist that drilling a hole and draining the abscess is the preferred procedure. Others - myself included - believe that cutting or drilling into the sole to try to release an abscess is invasive and rarely the best approach: while it does indeed relieve the painful pressure of the abscess if the abscess is located, it leaves an open wound for bacteria to invade. The hole left can actually leave the horse unsound for longer than the abscess itself. And regrowing sole over the wound can take months!

Most abscesses will travel up and burst through the coronet band within a couple of weeks. Others are simply reabsorbed by the body. Poultices can be applied to help draw the abscess to the surface; soaking with Epsom salts or a solution of water and cider vinegar may speed the process as well. Painting the sole with a drawing salve like ichthamol, wrapping the hoof in cotton and securing the bandage with duct tape may help as well.

As dramatic and scary as the lameness associated with an abscess appears, don't panic! Abscesses are a very temporary problem, and heal quickly and thoroughly, leaving no lasting problems.

A New, Improved Thoughtful Horseman Website is Coming Soon!

Better navigation...lots of new links...and TONS of information on all aspects of healthy, progressive horsekeeping!

<http://www.thoughtfulhorseman.com>

Don't forget to keep an eye on the blog – I often post articles relevant to new ideas and current questions there.

<http://www.thoughtfulhorseman.blogspot.com>

Bermuda Hay Facts

A lot of people tend to think of bermuda hay as the iceberg lettuce of horse forages: bland, nutritionally lacking, and no horse could possibly get fat on it! If you haven't been cornered by me long enough to hear what I have to say on that subject, you're probably nodding your head..."yup," you're saying, "just like rice cakes for horses, right??"

First of all...don't ever make the mistake of thinking you can feed bermuda free choice with no danger of a fat horse! Quite simply, it provides ample energy for the average horse in moderate work. If you're concerned that your horse needs more hay so that he has some to last the whole day, there are better approaches than overfeeding. Slow feeders are all the rage in the more forward-thinking horse care circles right now. Beyond merely creating a more natural pattern of food in the gut, slow feeders provide benefits including keeping boredom at bay, and minimizing the amount of hay eaten off of the dirt.

A look at averages from accumulated crop years from 2000 through 2008, as well as dozens of local samples, shows that bermuda is actually quite suitable for most horses. Of course, no hay will supply optimum amounts of all trace and major minerals, fatty acids, and vitamins. But overall, bermuda is easy to balance, and generally lower in non-structural carbohydrates than most other grass hays.

What about protein? A 1000lb (454kg) horse needs 572g of protein per day, with 19g lysine. Based upon an 18lb daily ration, our averaged bermuda would supply 818g protein, and 19g lysine...perfectly adequate. While additional protein is sometimes touted for weight gain, protein is an inefficient energy source compared to other options. It causes the horse to form larger quantities of urea, which then necessitates consumption of more water to excrete the urea. An increased risk of dehydration is associated with protein levels exceeding 10% in horses in strenuous work (endurance horses, eventing). Increased protein levels and elevated risk of metabolic failure have also been linked.

There is some debate that Coastal Bermuda may present an elevated risk for impaction colic, but current research on the subject shows conflicting results, and adequate water intake appears to mitigate the risk. It is widely assumed that the risk of impaction is due to low moisture and fibrous, fine stems, but again, this is conjecture. Some evidence suggests that an allergy to Coastal Bermuda may cause inflammation, which in turn leads to the impaction. It's important to note that not all Bermuda is Coastal Bermuda...there are many varieties, and only the Coastal Bermuda seems to be implicated here. If you're worried, ask your supplier or grower what variety they use.

All things considered, bermuda may be the best option for most horses in the southern states.

Learn how to accurately condition score your horse.

Many of the horses I see on my route are actually quite fat! Somewhere along the line, our perception of a healthy horse has become skewed. Part of the problem is simply the sentiment that "food is love". But once you learn what to look for, you can quickly and easily make a proper assessment of your horse's condition.

Here, then, are some websites that do a nice job of explaining the Henneke Body Condition Scoring System:

<http://www.habitatforhorses.org/rescues/bodyscoring.html>

<http://www.shady-acres.com/susan/conditionscore.shtml>

<http://www.umext.maine.edu/onlinepubs/htmpubs/1010.htm>

Heel Height 101

Balanced, adequate sole coverage is the name of the game.

I hear it all the time:

"My old farrier was trying to grow heel."

"Don't we need to grow heel to stand his foot up and correct the toe angle?"

Most of the time, growing heel is an attempt to create a steeper toe angle. Let me state right here that I disagree entirely with the practice of basing how much and what to trim off of the hoof by looking at the angle of the toe. But the real problem with growing heel to create a steeper toe angle is this: if the toe angle is too low, it is usually either: a) because the dorsal wall is flared, and there is no longer a tight connection to the coffin bone, or b) because the whole hoof capsule has been distorted forward. If the dorsal wall is flared, growing heel will only tip the horse's coffin bone even more perpendicular to the ground, and encourage more wall flaring. If the hoof capsule is distorted forward, the heel will have migrated forward as well. The heel purchase -- where the back of the foot lies flat on the ground -- will be pulled forward along with the rest of the capsule. At this point, growing heel will only result in the heel purchase moving even farther forward.

Below: Ara, a Thoroughbred mare, had a very underrun heel on her left front. In the first photo, taken in July, heel purchase is almost in the middle of her foot. Growing heel would only have allowed the heel purchase to move farther forward. In the second photo, taken in February, heel purchase has moved back; she now appears to have "grown heel", when in reality, we've just respected the sole plane trimmed the hoof in such a way that heel could once again stand up.



The one time we *do* want to grow heel is when we have inadequate sole depth at the back of the foot. There are a couple of indicators we can use to assess sole depth and therefore appropriate heel height. Finding the live sole plane is one way to decide where the heels should be. But very often, horses that are in the process of developing adequate sole will continue to shed some sole even as they don't yet have enough. We can't force

sole *not* to shed, but it's probably best to leave what's there and not help it flake out in this circumstance. Probably the most reliable tool we have, short of radiographs, then, is the depth of the collateral groove. Approximately an inch of collateral groove depth (measured to the wall, because it can be difficult to shed out sole in the heel triangle in a very dry environment) at the heel works well for most horses in our very arid climate. I've found that cleaning out the heel triangle to find true sole (when possible) and then trimming the wall approximately 1/8" to 1/16" will usually leave just about an inch of collateral groove depth, as measured to the wall.

Below: Tally, a Saddlebred gelding. On the left, before his first trim, with entirely too much heel. Sole plane and collateral groove height dictated where the heel should be. On right, after his second trim.



Sometimes, collateral groove height and live sole plane don't agree with what would appear to be a balanced hoof. Do we balance the hoof to the eye, rasping into the sole on one side? This is a bit of a conundrum, and an instance where radiographs are probably in order; evaluating how the hoof lands might provide insight as well.

It's important to remember that the inner structures adjust to sit exactly where they must in order to accommodate the horse's conformation. The sole plane then naturally grows in a uniform layer underneath. So between the live sole plane and the collateral grooves, we have a very reliable guide for correct heel height, wall length and balance. Instances where these barometers leave us uncertain bear careful consideration. But in the majority of cases, trimming to collateral groove height in combination with a healthy respect for the live sole plane will keep the hoof properly balanced.

How Long to New Hooves?

After spending months researching barefoot hoof care, finally committing to pulling your horse's shoes is an exciting moment. Just getting the shoe off the horse's foot restores circulation and feeling to the hoof. But pretty quickly, startling changes become evident in your horse's hooves. Hooves that looked nice and proportionate, with smooth wall, apparently concave sole and tidy frogs suddenly display pronounced hoof wall rings, flat sole, white line separation and weird, squishy frogs. Wall chips easily. Flare that you never knew existed becomes pronounced.

Eeeeeek! Where's that perfect, pretty mustang foot?? Did you do the right thing, pulling the shoes, after all??

YES. You did. Trust me on this. The truth is, the more dramatic, weird, wild pathology you see shortly after your horse's first barefoot trim, the more you've just helped your horse by pulling his shoes! If he already *had* healthy feet, not much would change. But it's a very rare hoof that comes out of a shoe truly healthy, and so most horses show some pretty astonishing changes.

Remember that the horse literally has to grow a new hoof capsule to repair pathologies and grow in a new, healthier foot. The wall grows mostly from the coronet to the ground;

the sole grows down and forward from the sole corium. At an average rate of about 1/4" a month, the new wall growth edges toward the ground. If all of the pieces of the healthy horsekeeping equation are properly addressed, from balanced diet to hoof hygiene and miles and miles of movement, within weeks you can see how much healthier that new growth is. Changes to the bottom of the foot appear a little more mysteriously, but as sole and frog shed, the whole hoof capsule begins to look steadily more robust.

Shedding sole and frog can look strange and unsettling. Sole can pop out in big chunks; often this shedding is accompanied by fungus under the old material. Frogs often shed an entire layer. Excess bar sometimes folds out over the sole, or in over the collateral grooves, and this too can break off in big pieces. This is all perfectly normal, and it's an encouraging sign that your horse is healing and growing the new feet he needs.

It takes up to 12 months to grow wall from the coronet band to the ground. Sometimes, the hoof has such dramatic changes to make that it takes two full growth cycles. It can also take time for the body to respond to diet balancing -- it can take 3 to 4 months to see the effects of correcting imbalances. And remember that if even one part of the equation is lacking, it could retard or even prevent your horse from having healthy bare hooves. But many, many horses are performing better than their shod selves within just a few months -- and it only gets better!



Above: It took 7 months, but Dune has developed spectacular solar concavity!

The Herd at The Thoughtful Horseman

I'm sure it's hard to miss the fact that I love horses. What spectacularly amazing creatures...incredibly powerful but sensitive to the lightest touch...graceful despite their size...funny, emotional, protective, jealous, silly, soulful, kind, brave, timid, generous, careful, spontaneous, thoughtful (yes!), gregarious, independent...complex, and at the same time uncomplicated. Every day I am rocked by how willingly they allow me to lead, how graciously they accept me in their social circle, and how delicately they handle my comparatively small and fragile physical presence. They *like* me -- they compete to be the horse I choose for a ride and clearly genuinely enjoy our time together, and that thrills me. The sheer magnitude of their life force -- the way they revel in their own speed and power -- their obvious joy as they buck and gallop at liberty -- puts the whole world in perspective. Live life to the fullest, gallop as fast as you can, feel the wind in your mane and the thunder of your own hooves.

So now allow me to introduce you to my own personal herd: the horses who inspire me daily to make the world a better place for equines everywhere!

Johnny...the old man...at 27 years, Johnny is dominated only by Leroy and Dune, and probably only because they're both appreciable larger than he is. Johnny knows how to throw his weight around in the herd. He also knows pretty much everything else. Like what's hidden in that pan of beet pulp. And that banging on the gate with his foot drives me bonkers and makes me get his lunch faster. He is about the spryest 27 year old horse I've seen; hardly a hint of arthritis. If it wasn't for his very dipped back, and the fact that I have 4 other horses, he'd probably still be putting in trail miles. He has earned his retirement, though.



Johnny No Spots, 27 yr old BS Paint Gelding

Leroy...the "herd stallion", or at least everyone lets him think so. Leroy spent his formative years in stalls and 24X24s. Still, his natural inclination was that of leader. When we first began to introduce him to herd life, he was a tyrant; at 16.3hh and built like a tank, he was a force to reckon with. He was all full-frontal attack -- he'd lift up that big, noble TWH head and steamroll anything that disagreed with him. Herd life has tempered him admirably. He is now the exemplary benevolent leader. He's also the "customer horse" -- the one we feel confident putting newbies on bareback. He has the strongest work ethic you could hope for, responsible as they come -- although I swear I've seen him give an exasperated eye roll once or twice when he's been required to carry a novice.



Dune & Leroy, TWH geldings: ebony & ivory bookends!

Dune exemplifies the fate of so very many horses: shuffled from owner to owner for his first 6 years, he was a face anyone would love: a big, strapping palomino with hazel eyes and an incredible mane and tail. But without a human he knew he could depend on, he was a slightly damaged soul. Walking horses are sensitive by nature; put them in the wrong environment, expose them to too much pressure, or deny them a sense of belonging, and you can ruin them for life. Dune was in "every horse for himself" mode when we met. Now, he's a different animal -- brave, tuned in, proud, and very, very happy to be a part of the herd. He has an occasional blond moment, but it just adds to his charm. Dune and Leroy are seldom far from one another...of almost identical size and such similar type, they look like ebony and ivory bookends, and spend hours playing "bite yer hocks".

Mixer is the serious one...a little brooding, but honest as the day is long. Opinionated, but in a very subtle, kind way...unless your name is Riser (see below). A sucker for hugs and petting. Typically confident and nonchalant, unless

the big boys, Leroy and Dune, are on a tear...and then to this day he still runs and hides behind his humans -- literally. Brave and blaise except for an occasional bout of self doubt. Likes to greet me from the back 40 at a dead gallop, stopping precisely a length away. The only horse I've ever seen that seems to float over the ground when he moves...is this what barefoot from birth creates? It's magical to watch.



Mixer, my homebred Paint, at just 3 days old

Riser...the red rooster – *smart, smart, smart!*, but just a little goofy...head on a swivel, doesn't miss a trick, sensible as they come, likes to pretend he's gone feral, but leans in for a hug and closes his eyes with very little provocation. Likes to take responsibility, although he is just slightly below Mixer in the herd hierarchy: he'll close the gate to the pasture when the day is done. Most comfortable bareback horse on the planet, and

smooth and reliable enough to never, ever need a saddle. In spite of their rivalry, Mixer and Riser are joined at the hip, and dominance switches from one to the other on a daily basis.



Riser, TWH gelding, affectionately known as the Red Rooster

All of the boys are barefoot, of course, and 100% toe-flicking sound on all terrain. Their main pen is approximately 100 X 150, and the footing is mostly packed river sand. Their pen opens on a 2 acre pasture, and they spend most of each day roaming the total area. They eat bermuda hay, some of which we try to put in Busy Horse (<http://www.busyhorse.com>) hay bags at each feeding. The herd is supplemented with the Thoughtful Horseman So Cal Custom Mineral Blend, which is fed in about a pound of soaked, rinsed beet pulp along with 2 oz cocosoya oil, 2000iu vitamin E, and 2 tablespoons table salt. Due to his age, Johnny gets additional easily chewed calories in the form of alfalfa pellets and more beet pulp, and an additional 4 oz cocosoya oil.

The Thoughtful Horseman

Trimmer/Trainer: Maria Siebrand

Phone:

619-865-9614

Website:www.thoughtfulhorseman.com**E-Mail:**maria@thoughtfulhorseman.com

About Maria...

My name is Maria Siebrand. A lifelong student of the horse, and a serious information junky, I reside in San Diego, California. With a background in the life science and software industry, publishing electronic submissions to the FDA, among other things, I have a bit of a bent for research. When my corporate career derailed after my third layoff in as many years, I realized it was time to turn my energy back to horses full time.

Ever dissatisfied with the stodgy traditionalist thinking still dominating equine training, veterinary care, and hoof care, I couldn't help but dig deep to find

better alternatives for the horses I knew and loved. The information - the knowledge - is out there, and it seems to be gradually percolating up through the stubborn layers of "but we've always done it this way". If I can help it perk just a bit faster, I will have served my beloved horses well.

I offer barefoot hoof care services, foundation training and horsemanship lessons in the greater San Diego area.

Interested? Please contact me at 619-865-9614 or maria@thoughtfulhorseman.com

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.thoughtfulhorseman.com

The Thoughtful Horseman

P.O. Box 181472
Coronado, CA 92178

