

Phryso Translations...

HOOF CARE

Hooves are important to horses and ponies. The English expression 'No feet, no horse', speaks for itself! Hooves have to be kept healthy and resilient. It is not a thing to be left to the farrier only. Also the owner or groom have important tasks in this field.

Good hoof care starts with sufficient exercise. By walking, trotting and galloping the hoof is continuously subjected to and relieved of loads. As a result of the continuously varying pressure, the shape of the hoof slightly changes all the time. This is possible because a hoof, although surrounded by a hard, horny mass, is also resilient in all its parts. This resilience is of major importance, because it stimulates a good blood supply to and blood circulation in the hoof. In turn, it stimulates hoof growth and improves the quality of the horn. Summarizing, we call this the blood circulation system during compression and expansion of the hoof when the hoof mechanism is subjected to load.

The resilience of the horn also depends on the water content. A high water content will increase resilience. Strongly dried out horn shrivels so to speak, it gets hard and tends to break away. To prevent drying out during long, dry periods, it is sensible to place the horse with the hooves in a stand containing wet sand. This should be done a couple of times a week for a few hours. Only spraying is not enough! The fact is that moisture is absorbed slowly.

Clean stables

Also clean stables help prevent hoof problems. Poor hygiene and accumulation of dirt in the frog groove can lead to inflammation of the frog. Small stones may cause sole ulcers. Cleaning the frog groove on a daily basis prevents problems. A hoof scraper is an indispensable tool. Inflammation of the frog can be identified by a wet, soft, irregular and partly shrivelled frog and as a rule begins in the middle frog groove. In serious cases a nasty, badly smelling liquid is released. Inflammation of the frog may deteriorate to sensitive walking, to lameness and thick legs. On the whole, it is easy to remedy.

Cutting clear and applying brown tar or Egyptian balsam works well. Tar or balsam can be easily applied using a hard paint brush. It is also effective to soak small, intertwined pieces of jute in tar and put them in the frog groove. A few times a week will do.

A sole ulcer usually leads to an acute, serious lameness, which, however, can usually be cured in a short time by exposing the ulcer. The pressure is off the hoof and the lameness usually disappears right away. Your farrier or veterinarian can perform these operations and advise you on the follow-up treatment.

Trimming and shoeing

Periodical inspection by the farrier is a must. A horse's hooves need to be cut every 6 to 8 weeks. With longer intervals they may grow too long, crack and break away. Then the lower margin may have worn off to such extent that it will be difficult for the farrier to set things right. During trimming, loose and excess horn is removed from the sole and the frog grooves are laid open adequately. The lower margin is shortened and

slightly rounded off with the hoof rasp to prevent it from being torn. The foot axis is aligned straight, when looked at from the front as well as from the side. Many full-grown horses have shoes. The reason for this is to allow them to improve the gaits, to prevent wear or to increase grip (through rough-shodding). From time to time check whether the shoes are still firmly fixed. Neglected shoeing has negative effects and therefore has to be replaced every 6 to 8 weeks. However, in addition to having advantages shoeing also has some drawbacks, for it interferes with the hoof mechanism. It should therefore only be applied when necessary. This is certainly true for horses in the rearing period. When unshod, young hooves can grow freely.

Conformation adjustments

Deviating leg positions affect the gaits and burden the joints. They can be caused by irregular wear or can simply be part of the horse's disposition. Cases in point are toe-wide, toe-narrow and straight hocks. In young horses the joint surfaces are relatively soft. They can still change in shape to some extent. Consequently, conformation adjustments can best be started with at an early age. Invariably, the purpose of such adjustment is to obtain straight foot and leg axes. With foals, you can start as soon as they are two weeks old. Rasping or cutting away a thin layer on the side of the hoof which has not been subject to wear every week can work miracles. You can entrust this to the farrier or learn how to do it yourself. Bear in mind, though, that it should be done gradually. Bits at a time is better than quite a lot at once. Regularly check the leg positions, also of foals who do stand straight. As a deviating position can be improved, so can a normal position end up in a deviation on account of undesirable wear. Especially in dry periods and with hard surfaces it is advisable to check the leg positions from time to time. This should not be neglected, for adjustment will be more difficult or even simply be impossible as the horse grows older. In serious cases it may be necessary to use an iron in the adjustment process.

Hoof ointments

Applying ointments contributes to a better appearance rather than to hoof care itself. Grease is poorly absorbed by horn and is not very effective as to making it more flexible. Nor does it have a curative effect. In some cases it may even work adversely, because it easily attracts sand and dirt. In the end, if a new coat is applied every day, a crust will develop around the hoof. This is harmful to the hoof structure.

PREVENT INJURY BY SPRINKLING

A good soil helps to prevent injury. All soils for training horses and ponies require good maintenance and management. Moisture control is an important aspect in this respect. All soils, both of indoor and outdoor courses, require moisture, depending on circumstances and conditions. Moisture has an effect on stability, the binding factor, of soils. Too dry sandy soils become unstable and thus too loose. This has a harmful effect on the legs of our noble friends. In addition, a dry soil throws up a lot of dust. Therefore, take care that the course can be sprinkled if necessary. The best solution is having a fixed sprinkler unit available. Alternatively, a tractor-drawn version will also do. In dry summer periods a course must be sprinkled daily.



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