

## TOTAL HOOF CARE MANAGEMENT

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What does "Total Hoof Care Management" mean? It could mean different things to different people. It could mean hoof care from beginning (foal) to end (through retirement), or it might relate to who is or should be involved in the hoof care program of any given horse. In my view it encompasses both. I think if we discuss this topic from these two perspectives, good coverage will be provided to the issue.

A large percentage of horses do not receive what most hoof care professionals would classify as adequate and proper hoof care. There are many and varied reasons for this, such as lack of knowledge of what is required, the inability to find qualified personnel to do the work, the lack of finances to do what needs to be done, inattention or forgetfulness or just plain lack of caring. Some of these reasons are difficult to remedy. It may be impossible to change someone's financial situation, difficult for everyone to find a competent farrier or difficult to change someone's values. However, there is no reason or excuse for an owner not to have the knowledge of minimum requirements for hoof care if they desire. That information is available from many sources. One only has to have the desire to be knowledgeable and then start searching for the information. There is much information available, but it does need to be screened for accuracy and thoroughness. There are lots of articles that appear in some of the popular press that contain misinformation, are inaccurate or are incomplete. In short, do not believe everything you hear or read. Act as if you were making an investment of your money and were expecting a good return -YOU ARE.

Hoof care should begin very early in a horse's life. Assuming there are no major problems, it is desirable to begin the hoof care program at about one month of age. Many owners have no problem with the concept of routine vaccination and deworming to prevent problems but are quite willing to cheat on hoof care. The best investment of hoof care program funds is early in the horse's life. Many problematic situations can be avoided by early intervention and prevention. This is much like some commercials that most of you have seen, "Pay now or pay later." The implication being that routine maintenance can be much more cost efficient than waiting for potentially traumatic events to occur necessitating that something be done. Additionally, it reduces the chances that a horse will not be available for its intended use, which no one likes.

After the initial trim of a foal, they should be checked preferably monthly but certainly at intervals of no longer than six weeks. This schedule should be followed for the first couple years of a horse's life. From that point on, the schedule becomes somewhat dependent upon such factors as how fast does a particular horse's feet grow, where does it live, what is its job and how often can you schedule the farrier.

Some horses grow hoof rather rapidly and some rather slowly. Horses vary in their ability to deal with length of hoof and the accompanying change of angle as the toe length increases. Depending on what their job is, this may or may not be problematic. However, the greater the level of performance expected of the individual, the greater the likelihood that the hoof care interval will need to be shortened. Corrective or pathological work will also generally require a shortened hoof care interval. A majority of horses will do well with a five to six week interval. No horse should go longer than eight weeks without at least being checked. An important concept to grasp is to not evaluate a farrier by the amount of hoof removed. It is just as important to know what hoof needs to remain. Having said that, it also must be said that one of the greatest problems in farriery today is the long toe-low heel syndrome. This certainly impairs the ability of a horse to perform well and greatly increases the chances of soft tissue injuries as well as leading to arthritic joint conditions. If the horse is not wearing shoes, it predisposes the hoof to toe and quarter cracks as well as white line disease or needy toe. Other problems related to inadequate or improper hoof care are abscesses, though corns and breaking away large pieces of hoof wall that may require reconstruction can also occur.

The easier part of this discussion is to determine who should be involved in developing and administering a hoof care program for a given horse. It is of utmost importance that the manager of a horse understand the farrier is not responsible for the day to day hoof care management of a horse. Unless there are problems necessitating more frequent contact, if possible, the farrier normally only sees a horse every five to six weeks. The person responsible for the daily care of the horse then must be the one who is responsible for the decisions regarding the daily care of the feet. Different horses have different requirements and basically everything that happens or does not happen to a horse has some effect on the horse's feet, be it positive or negative. Examples of things that may affect the feet are feeding programs, cleaning the feet, the environment the horse is ridden or worked in, bathing, hoof dressings, farrier care interval, and capabilities and conscientiousness of the farrier.

The first factor we might look at is the routine daily management of our horses. One item that has a major effect on the quality of horn of the hoof is moisture. More specifically, the concern is vacillating moisture content of the hoof wall. Extremes either way and frequent variances cause deterioration of the hoof horn. Some factors that contribute to this condition are bathing, wet/dirty stalls, dry bedding, standing in hot, dry sand, tall wet grass and application of hoof dressings and sealants. Also affecting hoof horn quality is the feeding program. The production of quality of horn requires sound nutrition. Certainly not all horses require additional supplementation such as biotin, methionine and other compounds; however, there are many horses that exhibit dramatically improved hoof horn when receiving such supplements. The key is paying attention to what is occurring with the feet to prevent problems from developing.

The second area we need to consider is selecting a farrier and allowing that person to do the best job he/she can. This entails many things, beginning with providing adequate and proper daily maintenance. You must apprise the farrier of your expectations of the horse and the farrier. At that point in time, all major parties, including the attending veterinarian in many instances, should get involved in determining a proper hoof care regime. Factors to be determined include shoeing interval, type of shoes to use and any special needs dictated by conformational or pathological problems. Beyond that, the rest lies in the hands of the farrier and will be somewhat dependent

upon his/her capabilities and his/her desire to provide the most optional care for the horse allowed by the TEAM effort.