

## Common Hoof Problems

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There are many different hoof problems that can occur in horses. Following these recommendations can help reduce the incidence of hoof problems:

1. Regular trimming or shoeing
2. Maintaining good hoof balance
3. Maintaining the correct hoof pastern angle, break over, and medial-lateral balance
4. Providing heel support if needed
5. Using appropriate shoeing for different weather conditions
6. Using appropriate treatment if injuries occur

**Poor shoeing or trimming.** Long toes can result in strain on flexor tendons, the navicular bone, and collapsed heels. If the horse is "too upright" it can cause trauma to the coffin bone. An imbalanced hoof can cause stress on the collateral ligaments and joints.

**Hoof cracks.** Horizontal cracks or blowouts are usually caused by an injury to the coronary band or a blow to the hoof wall. Horizontal cracks or blowouts do not usually cause lameness. Grass cracks are usually seen in long, unshod horses, and can be corrected with trimming and shoeing. Sand cracks result from injury to the coronary band or white line disease that breaks out at the coronary band. Sand cracks can be a cause of lameness. Treatment for sand cracks includes determining the cause and removing it, floating, and/or fixation or patching. It usually takes nine to twelve months for the hoof to grow out.

**Thrush.** Thrush is a foul-smelling black exudate usually found around the frog that is associated with wet, soiled conditions. Thrush can invade sensitive tissue and cause lameness. Keeping stalls or barns clean and dry can help eliminate thrush.

**Solar abscess.** Solar abscess is an infection in the sole of the hoof that can lead to acute or severe lameness. Solar abscesses can be caused by trauma, bruising, or a foreign body. Treatments include removal of the foreign body (if possible), soaking the hoof in warm water and Epsom salt, and keeping the hoof bandaged, clean and dry.

**Hot nail or street nail.** A hot nail is a horseshoe nail that is driven into the sensitive structures of the hoof wall. Hot nails will usually cause lameness. Treatments include flushing the nail hole with antiseptic, packing the hole or bandaging the foot, and administering a tetanus booster. A street nail is any foreign object that enters the foot. This is an emergency, and your veterinarian should be called immediately. Treatment depends on which structure(s) of the foot is/are affected.

**Laminitis.** Laminitis is inflammation of the sensitive laminae. Founder is rotation (coffin bone rotates downward inside hoof capsule) and/or sinking (coffin bone sinks downward) of the coffin bone. There are several causes of laminitis. Treatments include regular shoeing or trimming, maintaining short toes, using heel wedges, and frog and sole support.

**Navicular.** Disease process involving the navicular bone, bursa, ligamentous, or soft tissue structures. Horses will usually land their toe first due to pain in the heels. Causes of navicular include hereditary predisposition (Quarter Horses and Thoroughbreds), faulty conformation, hoof imbalance, and exercise on hard surfaces. Treatments include shoeing, maintaining a short toe, elevating the heels and good break over, and pads.