

# Proper hoof care provides solid foundation for healthy horse



## Trimming and shoeing essential for hearty hooves

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Running barefoot outside can be a liberating but painful prospect.

This same exhilaration, followed by regret, is probably felt by your horse if it hasn't received proper hoof care. Whether a horse is ridden miles daily or used once a year, hoof care is the foundation for healthy, successful rides.

### Anatomy

There are five main areas of a horse's foot that can be viewed while standing.



*The coronary band, toe, and quarter (see story) are easily seen.*

- **Coronary band** – Where the hairline comes into the hard hoof surface.
- **Toe** – The front of the hoof where it makes contact with the ground.
- **Quarter** – The sides of the hoof.
- **Heel** – The back portion of the hoof.
- **Bulb** – The portion of the heel that is soft.

Lifting the hoof and viewing the underside reveals four more anatomical areas.

- **Frog** – Soft, rubbery, triangular-shaped piece in the center, rear of the hoof.
- **Walls** – The growth on the outside of the foot that occurs over time - like your fingernails.
- **Sole** – The material between the frog and walls on the underside of the foot.
- **White line** – The line (lamina) where the hard outer surface meets the soft inner surface. This is like a zipper that holds the inner and outer walls together.

### Trimming and Shoeing

Trimming and shoeing should allow the horse to move freely without interference.

Trimming a horse's hoof requires removing old growth from the bottom of the hoof, including the walls, and cleaning the sole area. The tricky part of trimming is making sure the foot connects with the ground at the proper angle.

Just like people, no two horses are exactly the same – including body structure and how their feet hit the ground. A general guideline is a 45-50 degree angle on the forefeet and 50-55 degrees on the hind feet. Studying the horse's conformation helps determine if the angles are correct. Imagine drawing a line from the toe of the hoof to the first joint (pastern). This line should be straight with no angle. In general, the angle of the front of the hoof wall and the front surface of the pastern region are the same.

Shoeing starts with trimming then a metal shoe is attached to the bottom of the horse's foot with nails. Six to eight nails are driven through holes in the shoe and through the hoof wall. The excess part of the nail is trimmed and crimped to keep the shoe attached. Now this might sound cruel, but it should not be any more painful than pushing a tack through a long fingernail.

Making sure the foot is level from side to side is a crucial step in trimming and shoeing to allow the horse proper movement. Look at the foot while it is on the ground to ensure the foot is level and not tipping.

There are specialized tools for shoeing and trimming. These are:

- **Hoof nippers** – Tools to cut off the excess portion of hoof.
- **Hoof knife** – To clean away old sole and to trim back the frog.
- **Rasp** – A large file to shave down areas of the foot ensuring it is level.

- **Nail hammer** – Hammer to nail on shoe.
- **Nail clinchers** – Plier-looking item that rolls over cut ends of nails on the top side of hoof to crimp nail and secure shoe.

## Maintenance

Maintenance of horse's feet can be minimal or very involved – from an occasional trim to new, custom-built shoes every month. Considerations for time and money to spend on maintenance include:

- How often do you use your horse?
- What activities do you use your horse for?
- What time of the year do you do most of your riding?

Riding often occurs when weather is favorable from spring through fall. In this case, a farrier will come out at the beginning of spring to trim and shoe your horse. The farrier will return every six to eight weeks to trim hooves and replace shoes. This happens until riding halts or horses are turned out for the winter. Replace a lost shoe as soon as possible.

Horses ridden infrequently in winter should have their shoes pulled and one last trim before turning out for the winter. Snow can build up in the middle part of the shoe and make walking very difficult for the horse.

There are numerous resources including schools, videos, and books covering how to trim and shoe horses.

## Additional Care

Trimming and shoeing help protect hooves but other things influence hoof health. Proper nutrition is essential for healthy hooves. The correct amount of food should be fed – too much or too little can cause



*Whether ridden daily or infrequently, a horse's hooves require maintenance.*

problems. Supplementation is sometimes necessary, but in most cases is not essential.

Environmental conditions can also affect hoof health. Wet areas make the feet brittle and cracks will appear, causing lameness. Dry, hard surface areas are best for hoof health. Just think of mustangs – they have some of the healthiest feet with no maintenance. They live in dry climates with rocks to bust off and wear down their soles.

It's commonly said, "A horse has five hearts – one in their chest and one in each hoof." When a horse walks over rocks and hard ground, the pressure helps pump blood up their legs for circulation. When the ground gives under the weight of the hoof, like in wet areas, this circulation does not occur, leading to future hoof problems.

## Common Hoof Problems:

- **Cracks** – Splitting of the hoof either vertically or horizontally.

- **Quarters** – Cracking or busting off of the hoof quarters above where the hoof is routinely trimmed.
- **Thrush** – Bacterial infection in the hoof that occurs in wet or muddy conditions.
- **White line disease** – Separation of the outer and inner walls of the hoof caused by bacteria.
- **Laminitis/founder** – Separation of the lamina of the hoof. There are two different types: mechanical or metabolic. Mechanical is from an overload of the hoof. Metabolic coincides with severe toxemia, i.e., eating too much grain or lush green grass.

In most cases, these hoof problems can be avoided with proper hoof care. Contact a local farrier and plan a maintenance schedule that fits the needs of you and your horse.

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