



## Wound Care



Due to their nature, horses of all ages and breeds are very prone to injuring themselves. Almost every horse will have at least one, if not several, wounds throughout their life time; so as a horse owner it is important to know some basic first aid and to know how to provide ongoing care for a wound.

### **First Aid**

- *Don't panic!* - Be as calm as you can when catching your horse and try to calm them so they don't cause any further injury to themselves.
- If your horse is able to walk, take it to a dry, clean stall or a quiet area on the yard. If you feel your horse is too sore to walk, keep them where they are. A feed bucket is always a nice way to distract your horse from the pain of an injury and is often an easy way to relax them.
- Get an extra pair of hands to help hold your horse before you try to assess the wound or apply first aid. Wounds are often painful and your horse might be quite anxious - the last thing you need is for them to accidentally hurt you whilst you are looking at their injury.
- If the wound is still bleeding, apply even and direct pressure to the area using a sterile absorbent bandage, such as gauze swabs (avoid cotton wool). If the bandage soaks with blood simply place fresh material on top. By doing this you avoid disturbing newly formed blood clots when the soaked material is peeled away.

- Once bleeding has been controlled, try to assess the location, depth and severity of the wound and call your veterinarian. It is important to remember that wounds can be very deceptive in appearance. Some large wounds that appear horrific initially can heal extremely well where as other seemingly minor wounds can result in severe career-ending infections if they are not dealt with quickly and appropriately.
- Gentle cold hosing is a useful measure to initiate cleaning of the wound. Cold can help reduce swelling, stop minor bleeding and clean the wound of contamination. However, avoid embedding contaminants deeper into the wound by using too powerful a stream of water.
- The following is a brief guide to some of the things that should alert horse owners to seek veterinary consultation with regard to a wound:
  - Profuse bleeding that is not stopped by simple compression as described above
  - The entire thickness of the skin has been broken
  - If the wound is anywhere near a joint or a tendon
  - Wound edges that gape apart or if there is a skin flap present
  - If there appears to be contamination of the wound either with dirt or other foreign bodies
  - The horse is very lame, especially if the wound appears to be small
  - If structures deep to the skin such as muscle, bone or tendon can be seen
- You should remember to avoid giving your horse any painkillers before your veterinarian arrives as they can mask the severity of the wound. Also, avoid placing any topical treatments onto the wounds without consulting your veterinarian first.

## Wound Treatment

The overall aim of treating a horse wound is to avoid infection and to promote a healthy healing environment so as to return function to the area and create an acceptable cosmetic appearance as quickly as possible. Obviously some wounds are much more severe than others, but the basic principle remains the same. Wound healing and the final outcome greatly depends on its initial management. “A job worth doing is a job worth doing right” is very applicable to horse wounds and by investing in appropriate veterinary care in the first instance, one can greatly hasten wound healing and avoid lengthy complications and delayed healing.

Your veterinarian will do many things to ensure your horse’s wound heals in the best possible way; these may include some of the following;

- flushing the wound with sterile saline to remove contamination
- debriding the wound of necrotic tissue or trimming skin flaps
- suturing the wound if it is appropriate

- applying topical treatments
- bandaging
- giving your horse tetanus antitoxin or antibiotics if required

***“What do I put on the wound?”*** This is probably the most common question asked of a vet with regard wound care. The simple answer is that creams and gels are much better than coloured sprays and wound powders. Topical equine wound treatments have developed greatly in recent years and have vastly improved the speed and quality of healing. Hydrogels such as Intrasite® have been shown to promote healthy moist wound healing environments as well as aiding removal of necrotic tissue. Creams such as Flamazine®, which was originally used on human hospital burns, have antibacterial properties and significantly improve wound healing.

## Bandaging

Bandaging is one of the key ingredients to ensure good wound healing. As a horse owner, it is important to know what makes a good bandage and how to put one on. Every bandage contains 3 layers;

1. Primary layer - this is the layer that is placed directly onto the wound. It is non-stick so that when it is removed, the new healthy healing tissue below is not accidentally damaged. Melonin® or Allevyn® is often used as a primary dressing.
2. Secondary layer - this is the padding layer that provides even pressure over the wound. Products such as cotton wool or gamgee are good choices for this layer.
3. Tertiary layer - this is the top layer of the bandage that holds everything in place and provides compression. Products like Vetrap® and Elastoplast® are used for this layer.

Some areas of the horse that are prone to wounds such as the hock are often quite tricky to bandage. If you are unsure how to place a bandage over a wound, don't hesitate to ask your veterinarian. A good tip is to watch them closely as they place the initial bandage over the wound and ask them to explain what they are doing at each step.

## Proud Flesh

Proud flesh is the enemy of the equine wound and is essentially over zealous healing. It is composed of granulation tissue (a normal part of wound healing) that has developed excessively and in an exuberant manner that often protrudes out from the

wound and prevents further wound healing. Once proud flesh has developed, there are many ways to treat it such as sharp excision or by application of a variety of creams, but the key is to prevent it in the first place by initiating appropriate wound care right from the start. Good quality topical wound creams and gels along with proper bandaging goes a long way to preventing the development of proud flesh. Pressure over the wound appears to make a great deal of difference with regard development of proud flesh. As such, the longer one bandages a wound, the less likely it is to develop proud flesh and the more likely it is to have a good cosmetic appearance.

## **Horse first-aid box**

All good tack rooms should have some sort of a first-aid or bandage box. The following is our recommendation for what you should have inside.

- Disposable rubber gloves
- Chlorhexidine wash (Hibiscrub®)
- Sterile gauze swabs
- Various sizes of Melolin®
- Roll of cotton wool or gamgee
- Vetrap®
- Elastoplast®
- Intrasite gel®
- Flamazine cream®
- Sudocrem®
- A digital thermometer

As you can see, this is quite a simple list but it will allow you to look after most types of wound. All of the components of your first aid box can be purchased from your veterinarian but quite a few can also be bought from human pharmacies and some tack shops.