

No Hoof, No Horse

Registered farrier Nick Deacon DipWCF provides some advice on hoofcare

There is a well-known equestrian saying: 'No foot, no horse' and it is important to keep your horse's hooves in good condition. Like fingernails, hooves grow continuously and require regular trimming or shoeing every six to eight weeks by a qualified farrier to retain the correct shape and balance of the hooves.



Picking the feet out everyday enables you to keep an eye on the condition of the shoe and removing debris helps to prevent bruised soles and abscesses. Checking for nasty smells (a sign of thrush), an unevenly shaped frog and heat in the sole can ensure any problems are identified and treated before they become serious.

Seasonal management

Horses' hooves have to deal with different conditions throughout the year. In winter the aim is to keep the hooves dry and clean as wet winters mean horses

are constantly standing in deep mud or spending long periods in dirty stables, which can lead to problems such as mud fever and thrush. The hooves need moisture in order to stay healthy, but when they are subjected to too much water, the cells inside the hoof wall start to break down resulting in a brittle, weak hoof wall. Too much water also makes the sole permeable and grit can sometimes get trapped causing abscesses.



Horses tend to spend more time in the stable in the winter, which can be detrimental to hoof health as lack of movement reduces the blood circulation and as a result the nutrients supplied to the hoof. In the summer the opposite problems apply with a risk of the hooves being too dry and brittle. Applying moisture intensive products and exposing the hoof to water helps to maintain optimal water content. Nutrition is another important factor as hoof quality and growth depends on the horse's diet. Feeding a well-balanced and recommended supplement can help to keep your horse's hooves healthy and in optimum condition.

Top Tips

- Ask your farrier for advice on the best hoof conditioning products and apply regularly to the outside of the hoof.
- Check daily for lost, loose or worn shoes, raised clenches (nails) and any other abnormalities to the shoe or foot. These will require the immediate, attention of your farrier.
- Try to keep the bedding in your horses stable as clean and dry as possible to avoid problems such as thrush.
- When hacking out try to avoid riding over rough and stony areas as well as deep, muddy ground which may put a strain on the foot and shoe.
- Pick out your horse's hooves daily, especially before and after riding and when bringing him in from the field.
- Look out for inconsistencies in horn growth as this could be a sign that there is a problem with the horse's nutritional intake.

