



Information Leaflet No. 8

HOOF ABSCESS

A Hoof Abscess is a pussy inflammation of the corium, where the pressure produced by the accumulation of pus between the corium and the hoof horn. This pressure can cause the horse significant pain and leads to pronounced lameness - to the extent that the horse is unable to place weight on the hoof at all.

Hoof abscesses occur both in shod as well as unshod horses. In the following text, we are only considering the unshod hoof.

According to conventional educated opinion, a hoof abscess occurs when the horse has pierced the sole with a foreign object-that is, the abscess occurs through infection from the outside. Hoof abscesses, however, only very rarely arise due to external infecting agents. More commonly, an abscess occurs when the corium or lateral cartilage areas, which have been compressed for a long time, die off. After circulation is returned to these areas, the dead pieces of tissue are removed from the living tissue and carried to the outside by pus, since the large pieces of dead tissue cannot be transported away through the microscopically small blood vessels of the corium.

THIS PROCESS IS VERY COMMON IN THE TRANSITION FROM SHOD HOOF TO BAREFOOT.

When circulation is restored to a pathologically damaged hoof abscesses can be expected. Abscessing is predominantly found in the area of the heels and bars, and sometimes also by the frog, especially near the tip. Abscesses also form in tissues opposite shoes' clips, and also near the rearmost nails. Often excessively long bars that have grown over the sole, cause pressure points, which later become noticeable as abscesses or old dry abscess holes.

Allowing a healing abscess to naturally complete its function is preferred. Especially one that has occurred from repairing pressure wounds internally.

Some relief from abscess pain can however be provided if the abscess can be found by an expert and properly opened. A small round hole cut in the right place allows the pressurised fluid to drain. The abscess is then cleaned with a mild disinfectant like apple cider vinegar, and the hole closed with clean loam, clay, or healing earth. However, letting the abscess take its natural course is the preferred option. Bandaging is not necessary--quite the opposite, it can be damaging because it restricts circulation. The horse should be let out onto firm level pasture or paddock.

Movement is very important as it increases blood flow into the hoof, allowing for quicker healing. After 24 hours the hoof should be soaked, the cleaning repeated (with diluted apple cider vinegar or camomile tea, for example), and the hole again closed with clay. Then the hoof should be left alone for two days. After three days, the corium will be covered with a whitish-yellow skin, the newly formed sole horn. After one week the sheet of horn will already be thick enough for the horse to walk smoothly on even ground. For sharp stones, however, the sole requires two further weeks of growth.

Sometimes a hoof abscess cannot be found, for example if it is deep in the heel/frog/bar region. In this case, time should be given to allow the abscess to find its own way to the outside. Poultices with warm linseed or potato mash, which soften the horn, are helpful. The pain will lessen as soon as the pus comes out by the coronary band; however, this can take a few days. Conventional treatment would normally involve cutting away a large part of the sole or frog and it would be a long time before the horse could bear weight on this foot again. Often this is accompanied by applying bandaging and leaving the horse in a box, i.e. reducing the important movement.

For several days afterwards, one should soak the hoof daily in water with a bit of fruit vinegar. Natural hooves with normal circulation (and therefore good blood supply) are very regenerative.

Further Information:

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