Hoof Health Overview

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

HOOFIN' IT!

The condition of a horse's hooves, coat, and skin are generally a reflection of his overall health. Good hoof care keeps you on top of your horse's hoof health. While some horses naturally have better hooves than others, you can help your horse have healthy hooves. Many factors are responsible for your horse's hoof condition, including environment, previous hoof disease, and poor nutrition. Topical protection may also be another factor contributing to your horse's hoof health.

What are some problems that my horse can have with his hooves?

Many horses develop dry, cracked or thin-walled feet. Normally, the hoof wall is covered with a material that prevents escape of moisture from the hoof. If this material is removed or damaged, dry and brittle hooves can result. There are a number of factors that contribute to dry, brittle feet including:

- Hot, dry, and/or sandy environmental conditions
- Previous hoof disease, such as laminitis
- Poor nutrition (e.g., low protein or unbalanced diet)

Dry, brittle hooves can become a more serious problem if they split or deeper cracks develop. In addition, not just the hoof wall but also the frog of the hoof may become dry as well, and contract, along with the heel. This can be very painful for the horse and result in lameness.

How can I take care of my horse's dry hooves?

Management of dry hooves usually requires a multi-faceted approach. Your veterinarian and farrier can help you determine the best program for your horse, which may include:

- **Correction of environment.** In geographical areas that are very dry, some recommend providing a moist area, often around the watering facilities, where the horse will stand long enough for moisture to go into the hooves. Do not allow the hooves to become too moist, though, because that will increase the risk of thrush.
- **Proper hoof trimming**
- **Application of moisturizing hoof dressings**
- **Supplementation or correction of the diet** - a healthy diet is essential for healthy hooves, and this may include supplementation of certain compounds important for hoof health.

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What are some common ingredients in hoof supplements?

When you look at making your horse's hooves healthier, look to feeding your horse a diet with optimum nutrition for the long term. Hoof care supplements containing certain nutrients are another way to give your horse the nutrients he may be lacking so he can build healthy hooves.

Some horses, when maintained on a diet with certain levels of biotin and methionine, such as that in Master's Hoof Blend™ by VitaFlex®, will show improved hoof health. Biotin is a vitamin necessary for the health and growth of keratin and other connective tissue. Methionine is an amino acid essential for the growth of healthy hooves.

Grand Coat by Grand Meadows, contains biotin and methionine plus both Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids, both important building blocks for skin, coat, and hooves. This wonderful supplement also contains lecithin and amino acids, for quadruple benefits to your horse's skin, coat, and hooves.

Zinc is a mineral that does double duty as an antioxidant. First, zinc is necessary for the proper production of proteins that are present in skin, hair, and hooves. Secondly, zinc, as an antioxidant, helps to maintain the health of cell membranes, protecting them from injury from free radicals. Products high in zinc and copper, another hoof-helping element, are helpful for keratin and collagen production.

Other ingredients horse enthusiasts rely on for hoof care include:

- **Manganese**
- **Selenium**
- **Iodine**
- **Lysine**
- **Threonine**
- **B vitamins**

RELATED PRODUCTS

- Absorbine Hooflex® Liquid Hoof Conditioner
- H.B. 15™ Hoof Supplement by Farnam
- Icetight® Poultice by Farnam

View all products for hoof care >

What kinds of supplements contain nutrients for hoof care?

Since hooves are made of the same general substances as skin and hair (keratin), you can often find products that do triple duty and maintain the health of skin and coat, as well as hooves.

Remember that the hoof wall, like a fingernail, grows very slowly - at the rate of about three-eighths to one-half inch per month. New growth occurs at the coronet (the junction between the skin and the hoof wall). It can, therefore, take up to 12 months for the healthy new growth to reach the bottom of the hoof. This means supplements may take weeks or months to show results on the hoof, but you should see improvement in your horse's skin and coat within a few weeks.

RELATED INFORMATION

- How to Help Your Horse Have a Healthy Skin & Coat
- Hoof Problems Are A Whole Horse Problem
- How to Use Horse Bandages

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