Hoof Care Supplements Overview

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

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. Examine your horse's feet. If this material is removed or damaged, dry and brittle hooves are often the 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, unbalanced diet)
- Genetics (A mare with problems is more likely to produce a foal with problems)

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

Management of dry hooves usually requires a multi-faceted approach. **The best program for your horse may include:**

- Correction of environment - 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 to include more biotin and methionine

Common ingredients in hoof supplements

The most common ingredients in hoof supplements include:

- Biotin - a vitamin necessary for the health and growth of keratin and other connective tissue.
- Methionine - an amino acid essential for growth of healthy hooves.
- Zinc - a mineral that is an antioxidant and is necessary for the proper production of proteins that are present in skin, hair, and hooves.

Other ingredients sometimes included in hoof supplements include:

- Copper
- Manganese
- Selenium
- Iodine

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- Lysine
- Threonine
- B vitamins
- Essential fatty acids

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. It is best to get a proper evaluation of your horse's feet as soon as you obtain him, so you can take measures right away to ensure good foot health and avoid lame conditions.

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