

# Hoof Care North America Principles

Here we have put together a short synopsis of our philosophy. At Equine Soundness we are not teaching a specific trim or trim method, but give our students as many tools as possible, so they may become successful in their everyday practice.

Horses should be maintained in a natural lifestyle. Natural lifestyle means:

Living in a herd

Being exposed to the elements

Freedom to move

Continuous access to forage



We have to take into consideration that the horse is by design a prey animal whose primary defense is an instant reaction to, and acceleration away from, perceived danger. He is a trickle feeder of high fiber, low sugar grasses; that he spends around 75% of his life grazing in a head low posture and 90+% of his life upright, and that he needs to be able to regenerate his muscles through movement.

Understanding that domestication has not altered the horse's fundamental species needs and that failure to meet them may affect some or all of the horse's biological systems to some degree and at some point.

Accepting that healthy, properly functioning feet are essential to the optimal functioning of all the horse's biological systems.

The form of the hoof needs to allow circulation, shock absorption, protein exchange, mechanical protection and traction;

The horse has to be able to land heel first and the limbs have to move in an anatomically correct way; he has to be able to stand square in order that the stay apparatus and dorsal ligament system can be optimally engaged as, without this, the horse cannot maintain muscular-skeletal health, and without muscular-skeletal health, none the other biological systems can operate optimally.



Our working definition of a healthy, natural hoof form is:

a hoof capsule which follows the shape and angles of a correctly positioned coffin bone (i.e. which is anatomically balanced anterior-posterior and medio-laterally);

a toe length which facilitates optimal break over;

low, well formed heels which are able to expand upon weight bearing;



clearly defined, straight bars which ramp into the hoof and merge with the sole about halfway down the frog;

a flexible, thick, evenly concave sole;

a broad, tough frog that is level with the heel buttress and ramps into the hoof ending at the deepest point of solar concavity;

a strong laminar connection;

a dense digital cushion;

straight, thick, and flexible lateral cartilages.

### Trimming styles and regimes

The ideal for all horses, and the ultimate aim for all owners and trimmers, is where growth and wear are in balance. Necessary pre-conditions for achieving this are:

a healthy hoof;

the horse being able to land and stand correctly so that the pattern of wear is even;

sufficient movement relative to growth, on terrain appropriate to the type of hoof.

Where this is not possible, the hoof will need to be trimmed. How much, and in what ways, will differ according to the individual needs and circumstances of the horse. E.g. what may be appropriate for a sound horse with fairly good hoof form and which lives and works on firm terrain, may not be appropriate for a lame horse with poor hoof form which has restricted movement on soft terrain.



Whatever style is adopted, the ideal is to get as close as both possible and practicable to a natural balance between wear and growth. But, because posture affects the loading of the hoof, and unbalanced loading of the hoof affects posture, an effective trimming strategy must – logically - take a holistic view.

Uneven loading of the limbs has obvious effects on the locomotor system which has a particular impact on the horse because of its need to regenerate its muscles whilst upright. What is less obvious, are the complex (and often insidious) effects on all the other biological systems.