



Redemption Farm Hoof Care
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Barefoot 101: the horse owner's role

There is only so much that a trimmer can do every few weeks. You will see much faster and better results if you do your part in the horse's hoof rehab on a day-to-day basis between trims.

- **Thrush**

- ◆ Thrush is much more common than most owners realize. This is incredibly painful and most people don't realize how much damage thrush can cause. One of the big goals with barefoot rehab is to develop a strong caudal hoof and digital cushion. That is impossible if the horse's frog is painful due to thrush, and therefore the horse will move in a way that minimizes weight bearing on that sensitive painful area. If this continues over time, the caudal hoof becomes atrophied from lack of stimulation, and can lead to navicular disease / lameness due to caudal hoof pain. We need to get the horse comfortable so he can move naturally landing on the heel, which will stimulate the tissue to grow stronger and healthier.
- ◆ Most people only recognize severe thrush that is black and odorous. Mild thrush often goes unnoticed, but still causes pain. A deep narrow central sulcus needs to be treated for thrush until it heals.
- ◆ Avoid caustic thrush treatments, as they damage the healthy tissue, which creates a cycle – you get rid of the infection but the frog isn't healthy so it is more prone to getting infected again – this will continue until the frog gets healthier. So treat the infection without damaging the sensitive tissue.
- ◆ Treatment – see Thrush Treatment info sheet for safe options

- **Environment**

- ◆ **Movement, movement, movement!** One of the most important keys to healthy hoof development is lots of movement to stimulate the hoof.
- ◆ **Footing:** 4-5" of pea gravel in a location where the horse stands or walks through frequently (gates, trough area, shed, shade tree, etc) is like a hoof massage and will stimulate new healthy growth. The forgiving surface is also very comfortable for foot sore horses and will encourage more movement and they will become more comfortable on other surfaces much more quickly. Other types of gravel in different areas is very beneficial too. Conformable surfaces (shifts slightly underfoot and leaves a slight hoofprint) are most beneficial for improving hooves. Hard pack gravel of various types will create rock crunching hooves on healthy horses, but is often too much for footsore horses with pathology. Sand is comfortable for some footsore horses, but be aware that when it is wet it can pack in the hooves and cause painful pressure. The horses do LOVE a good sand rolling pit too!
- ◆ **Dry environment** will help prevent thrush and is healthier for the hoof all around.
- ◆ **Track paddocks** (aka Paddock Paradise) are great for encouraging more movement, as well as restricting access to grass. This is especially important for easy keepers who don't tolerate grass, and is a much better solution than a small dry lot where they won't move around much. This can be as simple as an electric fence around the perimeter of your field to create lanes. Ask me for more info, we have two different style track systems at our farm!

- **Nutrition**

- ◆ **Nutrition is just as important as the trim** when working with problem hooves!
- ◆ I cannot emphasize enough how important nutrition is for strong healthy hooves!
- ◆ Please refer to Nutrition handout for detailed info

◆ Trim frequency

- ◆ **The more frequent the trim, the faster and better the results.** Schedule trims as often as you are able. Ideally every 2-4 weeks for rehab cases. Absolute max every 5-6 weeks. If you go 6 weeks between trims, you will not get ahead of the flares and you won't see great barefoot results. I trim horses at my farm every 1-3 weeks, and don't even need to use nippers, just rasp a bit as needed. The less but more frequent approach more closely mimics natural wear patterns. If allowed to get too long and develop distortions, each trim will be trying to fix the problems instead of getting ahead of it and developing a better hoof.
- ◆ ***The hoof should never look like it is due for a trim!*** By the time it is visually obvious that the hoof looks due for a trim, it's been out of balance for quite some time. This adds strain to and can damage internal structures of the hoof, as well as creating excessive strain on joints, tendons and ligaments all the way up the leg!
- ◆ The exception to the 4-6 week trim cycle rule is a horse living and working on abrasive terrain (gravel/rocks) who may be able to self trim or partially self trim and extend the time between visits, or a horse who works hard on abrasive surfaces and self trims. This only works well for horses without balance issues.
- ◆ Problem hooves and those with medial-lateral imbalances may benefit from more frequent trims (2-4 weeks) than healthy hooves that wear evenly (4-6 weeks).
- ◆ Proactive owners that want to learn to do minor touch up rasping between official trims can successfully extend the time between visits while still maintaining healthy hooves. Ask me how!
- ◆ Ultimately, I require horses to stay on regular trim cycles at an appropriate length for that horse to be able to develop or maintain healthy feet. I am not willing to extend trim cycles if I do not think it is in the best interest of the horse!

● Comfort

- ◆ If your horse is footsore while transitioning to barefoot, there are options to help keep him comfortable while a stronger hoof develops. This is important not only for obvious reasons, but also because the more comfortable the horse is, the more properly he will move, which will speed up the hoof improvement timeline.
- ◆ Thin soles often require protection temporarily while we work on improving the hooves. This is important because without protection, the horse may bruise the soles or hurt the coffin bone, which can result in permanent damage.
- ◆ I have many great options for helping horses stay comfortable when transitioning to barefoot or when recovering from pathology!
 - ◆ Hoof boots with pads
 - ◆ Hoof casts
 - ◆ Glue on composite shoes
 - ◆ Hoof Armor

● Riding

- ◆ The more movement your horse gets, the better. If he is sound, ride as much as you can. Most horses will need some form of hoof protection on rocky trails at first, some will need it forever if permanent damage has been done to the internal structures or if diet is not ideal. I can do boot measuring or help with fitting, including custom heat fitting if needed.
- ◆ If your horse is not sound, do not ride. This should go without saying, but by riding a horse with significant hoof pathology, you may cause further permanent damage. Do not give a sore horse pain meds to be able to ride!