



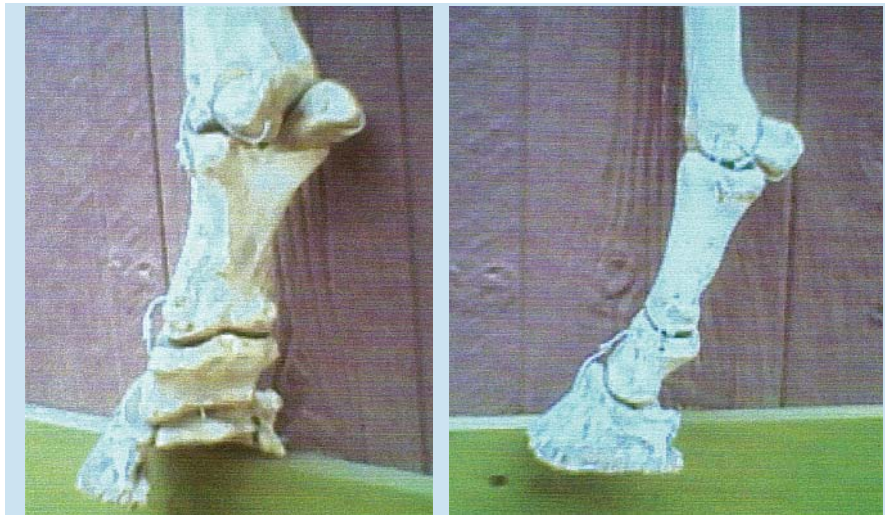
HOOF CARE HIGHLIGHTS

The Transition to Barefoot

The horse who wears shoes will require a bit of special care and awareness from his human as he makes the transition to life without the attached metal. Horse shoes restrict the normal (and desirable) expansion of the hoof and usually hold the frog off of the ground, preventing its ability to “pump” blood and lymph through the hoof during activity.

Because the shod hoof has grown accustomed to its condition of restriction and lack of stimulation, to suddenly pull the shoes from your horse and trim his hooves to “look pretty” - without consideration for their true condition - could actually cause distress and damage. A well planned program of hoof care and shaping after shoe removal can ensure that your horse is sound and healthier in a matter of weeks.

In this article, we are addressing the horse



How the bones of the lower leg and hoof stack up

whose hooves are reasonably sound and healthy to begin with. Cases of founder, serious injury or severe neglect will require professional input throughout the process of healing.

In the “old days”, we used to turn a horse out barefoot into a pasture to wear his hooves to their natural shape for support of the internal structures. We called this “Doctor Green” and many very lame horses returned to soundness with time in this natural environment. The key to maintaining that soundness, of course, was to continue to trim and shape the horse’s hooves to the form they had assumed naturally.

A skilled hoof trimmer who knows how to remove shoes carefully to avoid breaking away good hoof is essential. After shoe removal, the hooves must be trimmed and shaped according to the hoof’s internal structures, being sure that the base of the coffin bone aligns with the ground surface. The horse, walking on “digits”, needs that solid base on which to line up the bones of his legs (see photo) so their wear and tear are minimized and balance is maintained.

Hoof wall at ground surface should be beveled or rounded to prevent chipping or breakage of the wall. Enough hoof horn and sole must be left intact so it can provide protection where needed when con-

necting with the ground. Consider also that wall and sole may wear a bit since the horn will likely be soft, or brittle, especially if the ground surface is abrasive. Trim for the individual horse and his situation. Properly-fitted hoof boots or hoof wraps can provide protection with support for as long as they are needed.

As your horse’s hooves adjust to their newfound freedom, you will discover their true nature, be it hard, flinty, powdery, thrushy, etc. Moisture is essential to hoof health. In very dry conditions, like my own, simply dumping the water tanks and scrubbing them in the pens will keep a moist area for the hooves when the horse drinks.

When there is too much moisture, the addition of smooth, medium-sized (large enough to prevent lodging beside the frog but small enough to not trip the horse) river stones around soggy areas will help prevent thrush, scratches and mud “fever” by elevating hoof out of the soggy ground and stimulating circulation. Rubber mats could be used where needed as well. A variety of footings can be provided for the horse’s choice, such as: soft and spongy wood shavings, mildly abrasive and conforming pea gravel, sand, rough gravel and stone (available in many sizes), and firm packed surfaces or concrete (scored to prevent slipping and used only where horses stand or move slowly).

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If you are blessed with a creek or spring providing running, energized water for your horse(s), put hay in little piles on both sides of the water so they walk through it several times daily. If you live in the desert on sand, summer heat can make that sand scalding to hooves, so plenty of shade is essential. Sand really will draw the moisture from hooves, so fresh drinking water must be available at all times to provide hoof moisture from within. And if your sandy pens dry the horse's hooves too much, you can replenish them by applying aloe vera gel, olive or peanut oils or calendulated oil a couple of times each week. Use hoof moisturizers after hosing legs or baths (to retain the water that has soaked in) and allow a little time before turning the horse back into the dry pen.

Transitioning and rehabilitation include the rest of the body as well as the hooves. Good nutrition is essential; consider select herbs and supplements. Bodywork is beneficial and a gradual re-conditioning exercise program, because as the base of support changes, the musculoskeletal system needs to adjust. Consider homeopathy for seemingly unrelated conditions or imbalances. Think wholistically.

Exercise will bring vitality to the hooves and legs, enhancing rehabilitation. Be certain the footing and boots (if used) provide cushion and support. When you have initially pulled those shoes, work the horse moderately in softer footing. Then build up gradually to firmer, more challenging ground.

Allow time for the hooves to naturally regain balance and strength. New growth in the transitioning, normal hoof will be well-attached to the coffin bone, so new wall will align with that P3 angle, front and sides. The coffin bone (P3) is the internal hoof that, through intricate balance and attachment to the external hoof, mitigates the pressures involved in supporting a thousand pound animal. Smooth chips on the hoof wall with a light rasping as they appear. Work to keep the frog in contact with the earth and clean thoroughly around it to prevent thrush (apply tea tree oil or other appropriate remedies as needed).

Hoof bruising can happen from inner tissue damage as well as from external impact, such as from a stone. Either way, fitted boots and pads can help prevent these. Bruises can be eased by giving homeopathic Arnica before and after rides. Hoof growth can be encouraged (and abscesses

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released) by dosing homeopathic Silica.

As you transition your horse from being shod to being barefoot, you must think and act in moderation, and with patience. Get the coffin-bone alignment right, and the hooves themselves will begin to tell you and your trimmer how they need to be. Pay attention to them. Remove only what needs to be removed (no more), and allow them ample time to naturally reconstruct themselves. Support the whole horse with appropriate foods, exercise, herbs, homeopathics, and bodywork. 

About the author:

Katharine Lark Chrisley has degrees in Natural Health Consultation, Veterinary Assistance, and Reiki Mastership. Her company, Dharmahorse, is a Center of Learning and Healing in the mountains of New Mexico where the "sacred path" (dharma) for horses includes *Compassion, Simplicity, Clarity* to "Bring the Balance Back". Her first business was a school of gentle horsemanship and "natural" boarding facility in 1973. Trained early on by her grandmother who was a healer and midwife, Katharine owned and operated 3 schools of Dressage and was director of a Zen center. She now teaches clinics and workshops (contact her to schedule one in your area), and offers books and products as well as consultations.
www.dharmahorse.com