

Wound Care

Basic Wound Care

All horses get them and all owners must deal with them at some time or another. Many factors determine the specific care required for a particular wound.

How you care for a particular wound depends on the type of wound (abrasion, cut or puncture) and the location of the wound on your horse.

Abrasions

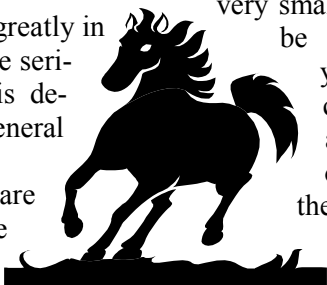
Abrasions, by definition, are the scraping away of the superficial layers of tissue. These are generally the least serious type of wound seen. The hair is removed from the skin but the skin is still intact. Bleeding can still occur.

Treatment of an abrasion involves cleaning with mild soap and water followed by application of a non-irritating, softening product. This stops excessive drying and cracking and speeds the healing process.

Cuts or Lacerations

These wounds can vary greatly in size, depth and location. The seriousness of the laceration is dependent on these factors. General rules of thumb include:

1. If the edges of a cut are separated, it should be sutured/treated by a veterinarian. This insures proper alignment for both cosmetic and functional healing.
2. Do NOT put any wound sprays, ointments, etc. onto the laceration if it needs to be sutured. Many commercial topical wound products irritate and/or damage sensitive tissues. Most of these preparations are designed for use on abrasions and will slow or stop a laceration from healing normally.
3. If the laceration needs to be sutured, the sooner the better.



Cuts that are not sutured within the first 8 hours do not generally heal as well since the area has developed swelling and the skin edges start to contract. The results will not be as favorable if you wait too long or do not find a wound when it happens.

4. Murphy's law: a horse will usually have a cut in an area that is difficult to heal, such as over a joint surface like the hock, fetlock or 'knee'.

The difficulties with these areas include a poor blood supply and excessive motion. Poor circulation translates into slower healing and excessive granulation tissue (proud flesh). Motion from flexing the joint/leg continually pulls the wound apart and requires a stiff, padded bandage to reduce motion.

Punctures

These wounds are generally small in size but are often very deep. They are the most difficult to locate and can be the most serious. A

very small deep puncture can be life-threatening to your horse if not discovered and treated accordingly. The object that caused the puncture wound (wood splinter, stick, nail, etc.) injects dirt and bacteria into deeper tissues which can cause a serious infection (like tetanus) or an abscess. Location is also a consideration. Puncture wounds are very serious if they involve joints, body cavities or an eye.

Puncture wounds generally require deep cleansing, flushing, and hot-packing. Antibiotics and a tetanus booster are recommended.

The rule of thumb with punctures is do NOT apply ointments because they seal up the wound and you need to promote drainage

of the area and not seal in the dirt, bacteria, foreign object, etc.

Bandages

Sometimes a wound should have a bandage applied during the healing process. Bandaging a leg wound can serve several purposes. First, to keep the area clean and dry. Second, to apply light pressure to the area to prevent motion and the formation of proud flesh.

Proper bandaging is vital.

1. NEVER apply vetwrap around a leg WITHOUT the appropriate padding. You will create a tourniquet effect and could cut off circulation to the leg resulting in disastrous consequences.
2. Always bandage from the hoof up as far as needed to cover the wound. Otherwise, swelling will form below the bandage and affect circulation.

Prevention

You may not be able to prevent your horse from ever getting a wound, but some simple steps could help to keep the damage to a minimum.

1. Check your horse over at least once daily for any cuts or scrapes so that they can be attended to quickly.
2. Check your barn, stalls, and pastures regularly for any broken fencing, nails, or other objects that your horse could get tangled in. Stall and bucket latches should be recessed to avoid a mishap.
3. Do not have any metal pole building material exposed. Horses can kick through it and cause damage to themselves.
4. Introduce new horses gradually to prevent problems.

Summary

If the wound is more than a simple abrasion, it is generally recommended that a veterinarian examine the wound to determine the severity of the problem and the appropriate treatment.