



July 2024 Foot Abscesses

A very familiar topic for some, foot abscesses are an all too common occurrence at any time of the year and can appear to be quite worrying.

What are the signs of a foot abscess?

- Sudden onset of moderate to severe lameness
- Resting foot/pointing toe
- Hot foot – especially the hoof wall
- Increased digital pulse
- Not wanting to stand
- Pus draining from coronary band or hoof.

Why are foot abscesses painful?

Foot abscesses are the accumulation of pus within the foot, often due to a sole penetration or infection running up the white line of the hoof. Due to the hoof wall encapsulating the hoof, there is nowhere for this pus to go, so the increased pressure on the other structures within the foot results in pain.

How do you diagnose a foot abscess?

Most foot abscesses are diagnosed by the history and the clinical findings. Careful examination of the horse's sole of the foot, hoof, coronet band and frog are required. Hoof testers are often used to locate them. It is often necessary to remove a horse's shoe to find an abscess. Sometimes the foot needs to be poulticed for a few days before the abscess can be found. And in some circumstances x-rays may need to be taken to identify particularly deep abscesses.

How are Abscesses treated?

In most cases the treatment is to find and open the abscess so that it can drain. This immediately relieves the pressure and makes the horse more comfortable. This can be painful to do and your vet may need to use sedation or even local anaesthesia if particularly deep. Sometimes letting the abscess "burst naturally" has been advocated but this often happens at the coronet band and can cause large amounts of damage in the process, so we do not advise this. Abscesses can be extremely painful and often require urgent treatment even at a weekend or evening.

What can I do to stop my horse getting foot abscess?

Regular farriery/hoof trimming is essential to ensure best possible hoof quality. Diet is also a factor, with horses needing a balanced diet of vitamins and minerals. Some horses can benefit from biotin in their diet. It is also important to regularly pick out your horse's feet and if possible try to avoid your horse standing in wet mud 24/7.

Should foot abscesses have antibiotics?

The vast majority of foot abscesses do not require any antibiotics and do not benefit from them. Antibiotics can have a negative impact on the horse's gut flora so should not be used unnecessarily.

Should equines with foot abscesses have pain relief?

Absolutely, when an animal is in pain it is very important for their welfare to try and reduce any discomfort. However, the best treatment for an abscess is for it to be opened to drain and we do not advise long courses of pain relief prior to treatment.

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How do you poultice a foot?

First you need to clean your horse's hoof thoroughly, and if possible, avoid the foot being too wet. Cut the poultice down to the required size (if you continually poultice the whole foot you risk the horse's sole becoming softer and thrush developing). Soak the poultice in warm water, squeeze out any excess water, and then press it into the sole of the foot, keeping the plastic on the outside. If there is also bruising present, you can then wrap cotton wool around the poultice and hoof to help cushion the hoof. This cotton wool can then be wrapped in vetrap to hold it in place. Otherwise you just hold the poultice in place by wrapping the hoof with vetrap. The base of the foot can then be covered in duct tape to try to keep to the foot dry. Ideally the horse should then be kept in a stable in a deep bed.

Should I be concerned if my horse keeps getting foot abscesses?

Some horses seem to get more foot abscesses than others due to foot conformation however it can also be indicative of underlying issues. It can be due to Cushings disease, so older horses with recurrent abscesses are worth blood sampling for this condition. Horses with changes to their pedal bone can also be more predisposed to foot abscesses this can include those with laminitis but also those with neoplastic structures such as keratomas. To rule these out we may suggest doing x-rays.

Do all horses feel foot abscesses?

Some horses are definitely more stoical than others and so the first one knows of a foot abscess is when it has burst out. Horses that have had front limb neurectomies may also not feel foot abscesses so for these horses' good hoof hygiene is essential.

If my farrier has found a foot abscess should I ring my vet?

If your farrier feels that they have successfully released the foot abscess and they have no concerns, then there is no need to consult a vet, however if you or they have any concerns we are always happy to discuss things over the phone.

Practice News

In September a team from the practice are taking on the 3 peaks challenge; the highest mountains in Scotland, England and Wales. Emelie, Bryony and Stuart will be climbing Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon within a 24 hour period and they really need your support. They are raising money for charity,

Want to support them? This QR code will take you to the justgiving page or via the link on our Facebook page



Did you know that the World horse welfare does a lot of educational work? As part of this, Stuart was asked to speak on a webinar on equine dentistry. The 5th of July sees the launch of the WHW "Horses Explained" series; check out Stuart's part in the 9th of August episode on <https://youtu.be/1Ww1iadDa3w?si=Shs0hSUa2Ju2H0gZ>

Please join us at our client evening on 10th July 7pm for 7.30pm start on Poor Performance. Focusing on gastric ulcers and orthopaedic issues, particularly backs and necks. At Curland Equestrian TA35SD. Please RSVP to Summerleaze@summerleaze-vets.co.uk or 01297304007