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Do You Have Tips On Horse Hoof Care?

Scott McKendrick

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ask A Specialist

A weekly question/answer column

Do You Have Tips On Horse Hoof Care?

Scott McKendrick answers:*

The saying, "No hoof, no horse," is an old statement, but still true. Regular hoof care will help maintain the proper shape and angle of the horse's hoof, reduce excess strain on the lower leg tendons and ligaments, and provide improved health for the hoof. Without proper care, hooves will usually take on an extended spread out shape, thus weakening the hoof walls and predisposing the hoof to excess cracking and breaking. Along with this, the horse will not be able to perform as athletically and safely for the rider. Consider these tips for optimal hoof health.

- The average horse hoof grows ½ inch to ¾ inch per month and completely replaces itself at the toe in 11 to 13 months. Unless something is mechanically done to trim the hoof, that growth can cause serious hoof and leg problems.
- Trim a quarter inch just from the toe of foals at an early age. This will provide a centered breakover point and help to allow correct breakover as the foal steps, thus reducing lower leg deviations from toeing in or toeing out tendencies.
- Clean the horse's hooves on a regular basis to reduce thrush, an anaerobic bacteria infection, and other hoof diseases. This can also help reduce possible hoof damage from lodged stones or other foreign obstacles, as well as to help monitor hoof health.
- Trim and shoe or reset shoes every six to eight weeks. It is also important to trim a horse that is in non-use every 10 to 12 weeks year-round.
- Use hoof dressings as needed. Avoid excessive use of hoof colorings since they can dry out the hoof.
- Provide adequate nutrition and exercise for proper hoof growth.

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