

No Hoof, No Horse –

The Importance of Proper Hoof Care

By Alex Valverde, Equine Advocates Communications Manager

The phrase “no hoof, no horse” may seem cliché, but it rings true; A healthy hoof is essential to an equine’s overall quality of life. This is why proper hoof care is an important part of an equine caretaker’s daily routine.

“It’s important because horses can suffer from a variety of ailments to their hooves,” says Melissa Murray, the Equine Care Manager at Equine Advocates. “Some of them are benign and some are serious, so you want to make sure that you get to know your horse’s hooves just as well as you know the rest of your horse.”

Murray says the first step to proper hoof care is making sure you have a great working relationship with a farrier or equine podiatrist, someone who is both a proficient farrier and licensed veterinarian. These specialists will make sure that your horse(s) receive a trim every six to eight weeks. A horse’s hooves are made of keratin, the same protein a human’s hair and nails are made of. Just like hair and nails, hooves grow, and if they get overgrown, their body gets uneven which can lead to other issues.

In addition to regular trims, caretakers should pick out a horse’s hooves as often as possible, if not every day. This is done with a hoof pick, which is used to clear dirt and other debris.

“You’re going to pick just outside the frog area, which is the little triangle shape on the bottom of the hoof, and pull down towards the apex of the frog, or the point of the triangle,” says Murray. “You don’t want to dig too hard because the sole can be sensitive.”

The important thing to remember is to not pick the frog area directly with a hoof pick or other sharp object. Instead, use a small brush to swipe debris from that area. Regular hoof picking can not only prevent hoof ailments from occurring, but it also helps a caretaker catch issues as soon as possible.

Three major hoof ailments equines can suffer from include thrush, abscesses, and laminitis or founder.

Thrush is a fungal infection characterized by a black, foul-smelling substance that typically affects the frog or adjacent area. It’s treated with topical anti-fungal medication.

“After treatment, you want to make sure to keep the hoof clean and dry,” said Murray. “It’s good to keep a closer eye on this issue during mud season because fungus grows in a dark, damp environment. The sole of the hoof is always pressed against the ground which combined with water and mud makes for a breeding ground for fungal infections.”

If a horse is limping and you don’t notice any issues when you pick their hooves, they may have an abscess. Abscesses occur when bacteria get trapped inside the hoof wall and cause a pocket of infection. Because of how sensitive that area is, this issue can be very painful. You can treat them with Animalintex Poultice Pads which help to draw out hoof abscesses and other infections. You can also fill a shallow pan with water and Epsom salt and let the hoof soak for about 20 minutes two to three times a day, or as often as your horse will tolerate. Hopefully, this will soften up the sole enough, so the abscess drains naturally. Once it drains, keep the area clean by applying a wrap or therapeutic boot.

Lastly, laminitis, or founder, is an inflammation of the laminae, which are the sensitive tissues that provide blood flow and sit between the hoof wall and the bone that’s inside the hoof. This structure gets swollen and inflamed which causes pain and pressure inside the hoof, which causes lameness. If you notice your horse limping and there are no signs of an abscess, call your podiatrist or veterinarian immediately. Unfortunately, laminitis is irreversible, so treatment largely involves pain management and supportive care. Various medicines can be given to control the pain, and careful dietary management is critical to preventing laminitis from recurring.

To summarize – It’s important to know your horse’s hooves and check their condition regularly, to prevent medical issues and to ensure a happy, healthy life.



Melanie, a Belgian Draft at our sanctuary.

Berkshire Humane Society
214 Barker Rd, Pittsfield, MA 01201
Phone: (413) 447-7878, Berkshirehumane.org

Hello friends! This is **Rebel** with a high energy nature. He'd prefer a home with a patient owner looking for a hiking, running and playful buddy. He walks nicely on his gentle leader and could potentially have a female dog friend, but his preference is to be an "only child" and definitely no cats please.

His ideal home would be with a family with children over 10 years. He's been diligently working on his housetraining, so he'll just need someone to help him continue to work on it. It's all about patience, right? If you think Rebel is the perfect fit for you, please reach out to the Berkshire Humane Society kennel staff at (413)-447-7878 ext. 126. He'd love to have a meet and greet with you!



This super nice boy is **Buddy**. Buddy is a 1-year-old domestic shorthair who has been waiting for a home since January 6th. Buddy arrived here along with his housemates because their owner passed away. Now, Buddy is looking



for someone new to love and care for him. Buddy lived indoors only, with a single adult. Due to his shy nature, he would do best in an adult-only home. He takes time to warm up to people, but once he does, he's an incredibly sweet cat. If you'd like to take a chance on him, stop by and meet him!