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# Natural Horse Care Guide



by Cynthia Cooper

# Caring for their Body, Mind and Soul.

If you love horses as much as I do, you probably want the very best for them.

During my on-going 35+ year journey of natural horse care and horsemanship, I've written hundreds of articles and blog posts which I've compiled here in this guide.

This will make it easier for you to find all the relevant information without getting lost on my website.

I hope you enjoy the read, and get lots of good information along the way.

Cynthia Cooper.



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# Horse Care the Natural Way

**How is keeping your horse naturally, different to normal horse care?**

**These points define what I believe is good natural horse care.**

**Understand or be learning about horse psychology** and social systems (ethology).

**Provide a herd situation for the horses to live in** – other equine company they can touch (no isolation from others), with natural breeding and weaning practices.

**Keep the horses in as large an area as possible** for most of the time with access to shelter from all types of weather – no constant stabling, small paddocks or confinement to yards for more than a couple of hours at a time unless absolutely necessary (eg. severe injury).

**Feeding a varied diet** of horse suitable (low sugar) grass, hay and grain (when required) with correct mineral supplementation to balance any deficiencies – includes providing salt at all times.

**Care for their hooves** with barefoot trimming and/or enough movement to self trim, and using hoof boots when protection is needed – no metal horse shoes!

**Provide appropriate veterinary treatment**, including worming on a regular basis as required for the man-made environment they must live in.

**Only use rugs/blankets when absolutely necessary** eg. when there is no shelter, recovery from sickness or injury, or for very old horses.

The following topics explain various aspects of these points, not necessarily in this order.

# Should I rug/blanket my horse or not? -



Most owners love the look of a new rug and feel good about 'protecting' their horse.

**Rugging or blanketing horses is usually something that makes US feel a lot better**, especially when its cold, wet and we see our horse shivering.

Keep in mind that horses have survived for millions of years without the need for man made rugs to protect them from weather. They have the wonderful ability to grow a thick coat with hairs that stand up to trap air for warmth and lie flat when its hot.

In keeping horses on small acreages, we have decreased their ability to find a variety of sheltered places during extremely cold or hot weather and to escape insects. In the wild, horses migrate to areas that serve this purpose as they need them.

However, it is possible to simulate a more natural environment in which the horse can happily live without the encumbrances of rugs.

# Should I rug/blanket my horse or not?

I've rugged horses ever since I started washing them and taking them to horse shows as a kid, so I grew up thinking it was all part of the process of keeping horses as many people do. In fact with the aggressive marketing we see from rug manufacturing companies, we are led to believe we are being irresponsible horse owners if we don't rug our horses.

What we don't realise is we are actually being irresponsible when we leave rugs on in warm weather, allow rugs to rub causing wounds and be a constant irritation for the horse.

An ill-fitting rug (and not many of them fit well) pressures the wither and chest when the horse grazes, has leg straps that rub especially if the rug slips and a general fit that restricts shoulder and neck movement.

**I'm not advocating that we should never put a rug on a horse** – what I am asking people to do is be responsible and sympathetic about rugging their horses and to understand what it feels like for the horse.

Imagine if at the first hint of cold weather you put on a heavy coat that you weren't allowed to take off.

How hot would you get when the sun came out or if you ran around a bit? How uncomfortable would it be for you to move around?

Life would be miserable and is for many horses who's owners merrily go off to work each day in the cold of the morning and then when the sun comes out and the day warms up, there's no-one around to remove the rug. The poor horse can't absorb much vitamin D or have a good roll, itch or run around and feel good. Some can't even find shade to relieve the heat and one of the saddest things is the horse who has a rug put on at the beginning of winter which is not removed at all until summer. This is not kindness, its outright cruelty.

No wonder some rugged horses stand around looking depressed then get all excited and jumpy or distracted by itches when the rug does come off for a ride.

# Should I rug/blanket my horse or not?

**So, what can we do to give the horse maximum comfort without rugging?**



Horses warm up quickly when fed loose hay.

First we need to provide shelter from the elements – mostly the wind and hot sun. That means having a shelter shed for shade and wind protection, large trees or hedges in an inviting position in the pasture which is ideally large enough for plenty of movement.

We can encourage movement to keep warm by placing hay in various parts of the paddock rather than in one pile or have water at the opposite end of the area.

We can also provide herd members to encourage movement as they play and enforce pecking orders.

By providing constant access to hay in wet or cold weather the horse can heat itself internally. With the combination of food and movement, a horse can easily regulate its own temperature and in the process, its keeping its hooves, muscles, tendons and ligaments exercised and healthy.

We can allow our horses to grow a thick winter coat, especially our young horses, and if we have started rugging as soon as the nights go cold, we can gradually leave the rug off starting with a nice sunny day and perhaps only using the rug in wet, windy weather when the chill factor is greatest.

Horses cope fine in the cold – I've seen horses in snow and minus 20 refuse to come inside out of the cold so long as they have the ability and motivation to move and eat hay.

# Should I rug/blanket my horse or not?

If you do choose to rug your horse in really wet weather, perhaps after 24 hours of rain and wind which increases the chill factor, then that's fine but remember to remove it as soon as the weather clears. Your horse will be so much more comfortable without it rubbing and restricting them.

**"But what about all the weight they will lose from shivering?"** I hear you say.

The answer is to give your horses constant access to hay – I've seen a cold, shivering horse stop shivering within 10 minutes of eating hay. The energy produced from digestion is enough to warm a horse from the inside out. We all know for ourselves how much food is a comfort in cold weather.

My 25 and 27 year old mares have never looked better in winter for having constant hay to eat. It is a natural feed and will put on more weight than many high protein and high energy feeds.

Their arthritis has also improved from being able to move around more.

Of course if your horse is sick or unable to move very much through injury or illness then a rug might be necessary for the recovery period. If we initially allow our horse to grow a thick winter coat then we have extra warmth when the horse needs it and we can remove the rug once recovered and leave it off.

# Should I rug/blanket my horse or not?

**“But what about riding when they have a thick coat – how do you cool off a sweaty horse without them catching a cold?”**

Giving your horse a more natural lifestyle might mean changing some of your lifestyle habits too in order to work with them and nature.

It might mean riding your horse in the morning so he has the warmer part of the day to roll and rid himself of sweat. It probably means you need to take longer to cool your horse down as part of your ride – walk home the last 2km or sit on your horse and allow some grazing after a workout. If you need to, you can put on a sweat rug that allows gradual cooling while the horse has a feed before turning out again.

It may mean a little extra brushing before and after a ride, but that’s good for us too and for the relationship with our horse.

If there’s a freezing wind blowing and sweat is still a problem, then put a rug on for that day and remove it the next morning.

A friend of mine is an endurance rider who allows her horses a natural lifestyle and doesn’t rug or clip her endurance horse. She uses a rug the night



after a competition but otherwise, the horse has a shelter shed and hay for warmth and does extremely well in our Tasmanian winters.

*Jen and Zamir at the Tom Quilty Endurance Ride - they train without the need for using a rug at home, and only use*

*one at rides where movement is limited in small yards.*

# Should I rug/blanket my horse or not?

Even if you want to go to a horse show, there's no rule about having a thick coat and so long as your presentation is good there is no reason to be discriminated against.

You will need to use a rug after washing your horse until the coat replaces its natural oil which can take a few days. A bit more elbow grease can bring up a wonderful shine on a thick coat if the horse is healthy and fed a natural diet supplemented with minerals and some sunflower seeds for extra oils in winter.

I've taken horses to shows that have simply been given a good groom and rugged the night before with white socks washed on the morning of the event and they have won breed & ridden classes.

**Rugs have a place and a purpose in the artificial environment** we give our horses but given the choice, a horse would rather have freedom from rugs providing they have the comfort of shelter and food. I'm sure they send us messages when we find the rug balled up in the rolling patch or ripped on the fence from trying to rub it off. Think of the money you can re-direct to hay and shelter provision when your rugs don't need annual replacement or repairs.

But most of all, think of your horses and what is more natural for them.

Here is a fabulous article about '[Thermoregulation in horses in a cold time of year](#)' that will help you understand the mechanics of how horses keep themselves warm.



# Responsible Rugging Tips

I generally don't recommend to rug a horse. However, there are times when due to lack of shelter, you may need to provide cover for your old or sick horse.

If you do, then there's a new rug available that acts more like a shelter than an oven like most winter horse rugs do.

This is the only rug I'd recommend and here's why:



The Coolheat Blanket has many advantages over the average horse rug:

- ~ It can be used on horses that have been allowed to grow a winter coat, without risk of them overheating.
- ~ It can be put on the horse when they are wet from rain or sweaty after exercise.
- ~ It has superior fit, with shoulder darts that work properly and allow the horse to graze/drink without pressuring the neck.
- ~ The unique rubber 'fingers' inside the rug stop shoulder rubbing and help keep the rug evenly balanced on the horse – no sideways slipping.

For more information on the Coolheat Blanket go to the [Product Review page](#).

Here are some tips to help keep your horse safe and comfortable if you need to use a rug.

# Responsible Rugging Tips

- Select the correct sized rug for your horse. A poor fit will result in rubbing and will be very uncomfortable for your horse, especially when running or reaching down to eat and drink.
- Prepare a horse for the first time of wearing a rug by being able to throw a sack all over your horse, rub it down with a towel and use a rope around the hind legs to simulate leg straps.
- Do up the leg straps and belly straps first – if the horse takes fright and runs off before the rug is fully fastened, it will fall off behind the horse, rather than trip it up or tear the rug to pieces which is likely if just the chest strap is done up.
- When you take the rug off, clip up the leg straps so they don't hit the horse when coming off or going on again. This can make a horse rug shy.
- Minimise the use of a rug – most horses would prefer to be free of rugs given the choice. Unless they are old, injured and unable to move well, or have no shelter at all, they will get by perfectly well without a rug.
- When you do need to use a rug, take it off again as soon as the weather clears up. In my experience, horses can cope fine with rain and it's natural for them to shiver a little to keep warm. Often an extra feed of hay will warm them up from the inside out. Rain with driving wind for an extended period (12-124 hrs) can be just cause for providing a rug for the elderly.
- If you are not able to remove a rug during the day when the weather warms up, choose one such as the CoolHeat which allows air flow and the horse to thermoregulate.
- If you need to put a rug on a wet horse, scrape the water off first then towel dry quickly.

# Horse Rug Heating Facts

By Dave MacDonald.

When you put your hand under a rug on a horse standing still it should NEVER feel toasty warm. This is a misconception.

It should feel more on the coolish side.

The temperature you are used to feeling under the blanket is too hot for a healthy horse.

Why ? Because a horses body temperature is supposed to be maintained at 38 deg which they can do effectively un-covered but can't with rugs on.

With a traditional rug on the only way this temperature can be maintained is if he stands still all day and this is not healthy for a number of reasons one of which good digestion depends on movement.

If your horse is standing still and feels toasty warm then as soon as he starts to move he overheats.

Muscle movement creates inner core body heat. So when a horse starts to feel cold he starts to move then as a result he warms up.

As an example, lets look at ourselves. If the outside temperature is freezing we put on a jumper and coat to go outside.

We feel nice and toasty warm. But as soon as we walk a short distance up the paddock our muscle movement creates inner core body heat so we start to feel uncomfortable so we have to take our coat off.

This is exactly the same scenario with our horses but unfortunately they cannot take their coat off. So they have to suffer in the paddock because we are doing what we think is right, not what our horse wants.

People who repair rugs are only in business because of two things. One is barbed wire fences and the main one is rubbing horses that are constantly uncomfortable because of what we put on them.

# Horse Rug Heating Facts



To counteract the heating/cooling issues, I've invented a horse rug that has rubber insulators on the inside to keep the rug off the horse's coat, and this allows air to flow through to assist the horse's own thermoregulation.

The Cool Heat blanket is not a scientific creation. All it does is shield the horse from the direct wind chill and rain while underneath the horse creates its own comfortable temperature through pilo erection and that is not a toasty warm feel.

With a Cool Heat blanket on, your horse will be as warm as he should be and the benefits are many. For instance horses with Cool Heats on do not get colds.

Why ? Because chilled sweat against the skin causes colds and with the Cool Heat's unique rubber 'fingers' keeping the blanket off the body, sweat is never trapped against the skin to chill the horse, as under the horse the hair movement(pilo erection) lifts the sweat up off the skin and dries it off but with traditional blankets the sweat is trapped against the skin and this is what chills the horse when the outside temperature goes up and down .

The many other advantages are listed on our site [www.macsequine.com](http://www.macsequine.com)

[Here's another good article on Rugging by Mel Fleming.](#)

# Summer Horse Keeping Tips

Before you go away on holidays (and hopefully arrange for someone to look after your horses), here are some things to consider for your horse's comfort and well being during the hotter months.

## **Access to shade and fresh water at all times:**

These are basic necessities no horse should be deprived of but sadly many are. If your paddock has no natural shade, provide some in the form of a shelter shed, shade cloth structure or make a lane to a place there is shade.

Fresh, cool water is vital so make sure the supply can't fail like automatic waterers do and buckets that can be tipped over. As dams dry up, make sure horses can still reach water without getting stuck in mud.

## **Watch grass intake:**

Especially in areas where there is a high rainfall and it stays lush. Sugars are higher in the grass during the day so if you need to restrict intake, let them out on grass during the cool of the night.

Be aware that stressed grass can produce toxins that cause laminitis so don't put horses onto a freshly cut hay paddock or on pasture with a green flush after rain following long dry periods.

# Summer Horse Keeping Tips



**Protect pink skin on the nose:** Horses sunburn too and white markings on the face often result in sore, crusty areas that are painful and can lead to cancer.

Protection with a sunscreen for horses such as 'Filtabac' (available from Horseland or your vet) is one that stays on well and helps heal sores too.

If you need to use a fly mask there are designs with inbuilt nose protectors or if you attach one to a halter, make sure it will easily break if caught on something. Providing adequate shade also

helps.

Filtabac is also an excellent treatment for mud fever/greasy heel if used daily.

**Protect them from bothersome flies:** Again, shade areas help as flies prefer bright light. Bot flies won't follow horses into sheds or very dark shaded areas.

Find a good fly repellent and wipe it on as often as necessary. There are some good recipes online for [natural homemade fly repellants here](#).

Remove bot eggs frequently in an area that the horses don't eat from to reduce worm burdens and the spread of bots.

**No rugs:** Allow your horse to regulate their own body temperature and repel insects by rolling in dust.

**Exercise in the cool hours:** Horses are like us, they get lethargic when it's hot so get up early or ride late to make the most of the cooler hours, especially for strenuous exercise.

**Allow access to salt and minerals:** If you have them freely available, your horse will take what it needs to replace those lost in sweat. Lumps of natural rock salt are ideal and a mix of dolomite, seaweed meal and garlic will keep your horse healthy.

# Summer Horse Keeping Tips.

**Soak hooves before trimming:** Either make a footbath or use soaking boots to make the trimming easier and give your horse hoof moisture in very dry times.

**Take care when transporting:** When it's hot, the inside of horse floats and trucks can be stifling. Make sure there is plenty of ventilation and when you stop, open all doors and windows to make up for lost airflow.

If your horse has a long distance to travel, ensure they will drink water by adding molasses at home to train them to drink any water. Molasses is also a natural electrolyte but you may need to give a supplement as well. Don't put rugs on travelling horses unless they need protection from rain.



# Drought Strategies To Help Your Horses -



Drought is hard on you, your horse and your pocket so knowing how to make life more comfortable during such a depressing time helps a lot. The three main issues to be addressed are:

1. Feed,
2. Water and
3. Pasture/Property Management.

**Feed is obviously the biggest issue** and as it becomes scarce whether on the ground or to purchase, we will have to consider other options to keep our horses healthy.

Firstly, it's important to learn how to condition score your horse so you know what body condition is acceptable and when to increase feed. It will help if you regularly estimate your horse's weight either with a weigh band or by calculating weight based on girth and length measurements.

Here is a [good guide on how to condition score your horse based on the Huntington Method used in Australia.](#)

If you are in the USA you will most probably use the [Henneke Condition Score system.](#)

Next you need to assess what feed is available and how you will manage it – if you still have some grass, then decide if you will be better off restricting your horse to easily re-generated paddocks or if you can rotate pastures frequently enough to not permanently kill the pasture.

To save money when supplementing roughage such as hay or straw using a [slowfeed hay net](#) or feeder will also reduce wastage.

# Drought Strategies To Help Your Horses -

You will need to supplement the pasture (or lack of it) with roughage and in most cases, concentrates which will also become more expensive and in short supply so it helps to know what alternatives you can safely use.

Again, the booklet above has some very good charts on the feed value of various alternatives of which there are many. Be sure to consult this information and your vet before starting to feed anything out of the ordinary to your horse and be aware that sudden feed changes or too much can cause colic.

There is a very good booklet called [Drought Feeding and Management for Horses by David Nash](#) that goes into much more detail than I can in this article so download this excellent resource.

It's a very worthwhile exercise identifying all the plants available on your property and in nearby lanes, roads or un-used areas as there may be many plants commonly called weeds that have herbal and nutritional value that can give your horse some variety and green, succulent food.



*Check that weeds you have are safe for your horses to eat.*

# Drought Strategies To Help Your Horses -

As an example when I did a survey on my own place I found Tree lucerne (or Tasagate), Cleavers (sticky weed), Willow, Black Thistle (like Scotch thistle), Bidgee-Widgee (Buzzies), Slender Thistle, Fennel, Spiny Rushes, Sweet Briar, Common Sow Thistle (milk thistle), Dandelion, Nettles and of course blackberries, all of which are edible and not poisonous to horses.

It is helpful to also identify all those plants that are poisonous and know the symptoms they produce for if there is a lack of roughage, horses will eat those plants so they should be removed from their pastures. There is an excellent book called a Field Guide to Weeds in Australia by Charles Lamp and Frank Collett that will help you with identification as it has clear photos and thorough descriptions.

The drought booklet you have downloaded lists all the poisonous plants and a good herb book will tell you what herbs can be used for horses or [click here for Country Park Herbs web site](#).

Many herbs are classified as weeds so don't be put off by that – just do the research.

In most cases, well fed horses will select only those plants that are safe or helpful for them to eat and these can include some Australian natives.

When we go for a trail ride, I always allow my horses to nibble on things they fancy so they have shown me they like 'Dolly bush', various sedges and rushes, native tussock grasses, gorse and thistle flowers.

All these plants can provide nutrients the horse needs so taking your horse out for a 'grazing ride' is most helpful. Its also a good way to warm up as you leave (and satisfy their urge to eat) then cool them down the last kilometre home.

# Drought Strategies To Help Your Horses -



*Check water holes regularly to ensure they are clean and safe.*

The third important factor in your drought strategy is to consider water and **minerals**. Water is vital and it must be a clean, reliable source that is checked regularly.

As dams get lower algae can cause a bad smell which could put some horses off drinking enough. As the water lowers, also check that the sides don't become too steep or boggy for the horse to access the water. It may be better to syphon the water into a trough or fence the dam off and provide an alternative trough.

Smelly water caused by algae can be treated by adding gardening lime (Limil) to the water – a few cups per 1,000 litres in a tank or a bag or more for dams, depending on their size.

If you are using bore water it is a good policy to have the water tested as some highly mineralised water may contribute to the development of enteroliths (stones) that cause colic and require surgery to remove them.

Drought weather is usually hot so your horse will sweat more therefore require salt and **other minerals**. Having a free choice mineral lick and separate salt block or loose salt is a start, but adding minerals to their bucket feed is best to ensure each horse gets enough. If using licks, make sure you have enough available for a larger herd so that all horses can access them, otherwise the lower herd members don't get a chance to partake before the others move off.

If you are exercising your horse to a sweat, then you may also need to supplement with electrolytes and/or additional salt – up to 3 tablespoons per day depending on how hard you exercise, and how they tolerate the taste.

**[Read more about the importance of salt here.](#)**

# Drought Strategies To Help Your Horses



Remember also that shelter from the sun is very important in the dry summer months so ensure your horse has access to shade at all times.

Watch that dominant horses aren't hogging all the shade, especially when there's only one shelter shed or shade tree.

*A nice big shade tree can accommodate the whole herd.*

Be very careful with rugs and if possible, don't use them at all as the horse can then **regulate their own temperature** far better without them. Even cool cotton rugs can elevate a horse's temperature as most are made from poly cotton so the synthetic fibre content can trap heat.

To check if your horse is over-heating when rugged, take their temperature first thing in the morning when its cool then again during the hottest part of the day. Compare this with and without rugs on to see if there is a big difference or if the higher reading is outside the normal range. If it is, you are stressing your horse and should remove the rug/blanket.

There are many more things to consider during a drought, including the option of agisting/boarding your horse where there is feed or better water and shelter.

You need to weigh up the positives and negatives in doing so, and do what is best for the horse at all times.

And if you can help other horses that have been abandoned or neglected by their owners during tough times, please do so for the horse's welfare.

# Equine Nutrition

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What Every Horse Needs, Period.

by **Juliet M. Getty, Ph.D.**



*Easy access to clean water is vital. Check dams regularly for contamination, steep sides or deep mud.*

The horse world is cluttered with feeds, supplements, and remedies all promising a better, “new and improved” horse. While many such products do in fact improve horses’ health and condition, there are certain basics that every horse needs, regardless of breed, age, condition, or purpose. Even seasonal or regional changes do not alter these foundational principles.

## **Water is the most important nutrient.**

Here are some factors to consider:

It must be plentiful, clean, and of the right temperature to encourage horses to drink. A horse at maintenance, living in a temperate climate will require a minimum of ½ to 1 gallon per hundred pounds of body weight. For the 1100 lb (500 kg) horse, that equates to 5.5 to 11 gallons (21 to 42 liters) per day. [i] However, his demand for water will increase with activity and warmer temperatures.

# Equine Nutrition

Here are some factors to consider:

- Water must be freshened daily. Dead insects, bird droppings and excessive pond scum can poison your horse[ii]. Using smaller water troughs can make cleaning easier.
- Never add salt or electrolytes to your horse's only water supply. Plain water must always be available.
- Pasture is high in moisture, typically containing 60 to 80 percent water, whereas most hays have only 7 to 10% moisture.
- High protein diets increase water requirements since protein can have a diuretic effect.
- During cold weather, horses drink less, especially if the water is ice cold. This potentially leads to dehydration – the main cause of colic in the winter. Heating water between 45 and 60 degrees F (7 to 15 degrees C) will promote more water consumption. Be sure the heater has no exposed wires that could electrify the water source.
- If you rely on creeks or ponds, the water must be moving and deep enough to not freeze.
- Snow consumption will not meet your horse's water requirement. One gallon of average snow contains only 10 ounces of water. Also, eating snow will force your horse to burn precious calories needed to keep his body temperature steady.

# Equine Nutrition

## **Salt is required daily, regardless of the season**

A full-sized horse requires at least one ounce (two level tablespoons or 30 ml) of salt each day for maintenance — this much provides 12 grams of sodium. Heat, humidity, and exercise increase the horse's need.

In cold seasons, salt helps promote that all-important water consumption. In warm seasons, supplemented salt replaces what is lost from perspiration.



There are several ways to accomplish this:

*Salt can be made available in a covered area – this one is made from an old apple bin with a roof added for use in the paddock.*

# Equine Nutrition

- Granulated salt can be offered free-choice. Check your source for prussic acid, an anti-caking agent. This contains cyanide and should be avoided.
- A salt rock should be available should your horse want more. Experiment with different natural types to see what your horse enjoys most. Many horses, however, are not comfortable with constant licking.
- If salt consumption is too low via free-choice feeding, calculate the amount of sodium your horse is getting from any commercial feeds or supplements and add salt accordingly. (For palatability, limit the amount to no more than 1 tablespoon per meal.)
- Do not offer electrolyte supplements instead of plain salt. Electrolytes are meant to replace perspiration losses and the horse must be in good sodium balance (from salt) before adding them.  
Watch the iodine content in mineralized salt preparations. Too much iodine, and not enough selenium, can damage the thyroid gland. Iodine and selenium intakes need to be similar.

## **Forage is the foundation of the diet – it must flow through the digestive tract 24/7**

Horses are grazing animals and are designed to consume forage virtually all day and night, only taking a few minutes here and there to rest; this also includes ponies, minis, donkeys, and mules.

There are many reasons why your horse must always have hay and/or pasture:

# Equine Nutrition

- The horse's stomach produces acid continuously, even when empty. The acid in an empty stomach can lead to the formation of ulcers anywhere along the gastrointestinal tract.  
The cecum, where fiber is fermented, has its entrance and exit at the top; therefore, it must be full in order to evacuate digested forage. If not, substances sink to the bottom, potentially leading to impactions and sand colic.
- The digestive tract consists of muscles which are "exercised" by the steady flow of forage. "Flabby" muscles can twist or intussuscept (telescope)—increasing the risk of colic.
- An empty stomach causes incredible stress, creating a hormonal response that raises insulin, an inflammatory hormone that can potentiate laminitis.
- Stress from forage restriction can lead to obesity, a damaged metabolic rate, laminitis relapses, and inflammation of the hypothalamic region of the brain, accelerating the development of leptin resistance and even Cushing's disease.[iii]
- Elevated stress also impacts immune function, making your horse more susceptible to infections and allergies, as well as negative reactions to vaccinations.

Don't let anyone scare you into thinking that feeding hay free-choice will damage your horse. Please read "[Equine Digestion – It's Decidedly Different](#)" to empower you with the knowledge needed to help your horses.[iv] Hay testing and commercially available "[slow feeders](#)" are worthwhile for many horses.[v]

# Equine Nutrition

## Replace what is missing in hay

*Horses happily eating from the round bale with a Haysaver Net.*



Many horses rely entirely on hay for their forage needs. Is hay nutritious? Not very. Hay is dead grass; it no longer contains many of the vitamins, omega 3s and omega 6s it once had as living pasture. It does, however, contain protein, carbohydrates, and minerals, and is a significant source of energy.

Consider the following to fill in the nutritional gaps:

- Add a comprehensive vitamin/**mineral supplement** that offers what hay is missing — beta carotene (or vitamin A), vitamin D, and vitamin E.
- Vitamin C is lost in hay; however, young horses' bodies produce adequate amounts. As horses age, the liver can become less efficient at synthesizing this vitamin.
- Add a variety of protein sources by feeding several types of forages. When only one type of hay is fed, the protein quality of the diet is poor and can prevent your horse from replacing and repairing tissues throughout the body.
- Sunlight exposure is needed for vitamin D production. The precursor to vitamin D is naturally found in grass, but diminishes the longer hay is stored.
- Simulate the fatty acid content of grasses by providing a feed source that has more omega 3s than omega 6s. Chia seeds or ground flaxseeds are good choices.[vi]

# Equine Nutrition

## **Movement, companionship and shelter are vital necessities**



*Companionship and movement are two key ingredients for healthy, happy horses.*

Horses need to move and have the protection of a buddy. Standing in a small area for hours on end (even if part of it is

outdoors) takes its toll on your horse's mental and physical health. So does being isolated from buddies. The stress can be so great that it dramatically diminishes your horse's quality and length of life by compromising his immune system and hormonal responses.

We see the effect in a vast variety of health issues:

- Obesity, insulin resistance, loss of muscle mass, and sluggish metabolic rate
- Porous bones and potential fractures
- Inadequate blood circulation, reducing the flow of nutrients and oxygen to the feet, joints, tendons/ligaments, and hair follicles
- Potential for digestive disorders including colic, ulcers, and diarrhea
- Compensatory behavior, including weaving, stall-walking, pawing, wall-kicking, chewing, head-bobbing, self-biting, and even cribbing
- Slowed cartilage and joint development in growing horses
- Accelerated aging, increasing susceptibility to infections, insect-borne diseases, and allergic responses
- Increased oxidative stress, promoting degenerative diseases such as arthritis and equine Cushing's disease at a younger age

# Equine Nutrition

Horses also need shelter from harsh weather. This can best be accomplished by offering your horse the option to make choices. Barn stalls that can be entered and left at will through open gates allow your horse to decide what is most comfortable.

## **Bottom line**

Horses are individuals and may need additional nutrients and care, but covering the basics of water, salt, forage, necessary supplementation, movement, stress reduction, and shelter will optimize your horse's foundation for a lifetime of vibrant health.



# Your Horse is what it Eats -

Horses evolved to eat small amounts of grasses, herbs and minerals almost constantly throughout the day.

They covered many miles to reach water and lived in small herds of varied ages and sexes.

Does this sound like the modern horse?

Not really – their involvement with humans has necessitated their restriction and artificial feeding for ease of use as a working animal.

But today the majority of horses are used for pleasure, sport and companionship, and so our methods of feeding them are also evolving.



Many new ideas are replacing traditional methods of health care, with hoof-care and feeding now the focus for improving overall health and longevity.

If we want a long lived, happy, healthy equine then we need to change our ways to suit their true nature.

Natural Hoof Care practitioners and forage researchers have highlighted that horses cannot be fed like cows – on high sugar grasses that maximise beef and milk production, if we want them to remain sound.

To do so, compromises their health by causing **laminitis** as they become more carbohydrate intolerant – commonly called 'good doers' and known as being 'insulin resistant'.

# Your Horse is what it Eats -

When horses eat high sugar grasses it causes a toxic reaction in the hind gut which then affects the connection between hoof wall and laminae (sensitive internal structure).

This causes common hoof ailments such as **abscesses**, **seedy toe**, white line disease and deformed, shallow, sensitive hooves.

With a little thought and planning, better feeding and management practices can help us avoid most of these issues.



*Using a small hole net extends eating time, and helps avoid gut ulcers and colics.*

Changes you can make:

**Ensure grass hay is fed** as the main diet, along with free choice loose salt and/or a salt lick.

By using **slowfeed hay nets** you can slow down and extend the intake time.

**Feed a quality balanced mineral mix** (daily if possible) to make up for shortfalls in the diet, and overcome issues such as a bleached coat, greasy heel/mudfever, thrush, seedy toe and rainscald.

**Avoid feeding grain** unless your horse is receiving enough additional exercise to utilise the energy it provides. Racehorses, endurance and performance horses will need extra feed tailored to their needs.

Broodmares, foals and young growing horses may need some grains and legumes (lucerne) to provide additional protein and calcium.

Aged horses not maintaining weight may need beet pulp or soy hulls that are easier to digest.

All other horses will generally maintain weight safely on free-choice hay with the use of **slowfeed haynets** to extend the time taken to eat their daily ration.

# Your Horse is What it Eats

**Soaking hay** – Some good doers will need to have their 'sugar rich' hay soaked for a few hours to lower the sugar content. Rich hay is usually cut from rye grass & clover pastures designed for fattening cattle.

The only way to find out if your hay is high in sugars is to **have it tested**.

**Restrict grass intake** appropriately for each horse – most will need to be kept off grass during the evening when the grass sugars are highest. Some insulin resistant horses may only be able to tolerate a couple of hours in the very early morning, especially in spring/autumn.

**Grazing muzzles** – some 'good doers' will need to wear a grazing muzzle some of the time to remain with the herd. It's not comfortable for them to wear a muzzle all the time and colic may result if they don't get enough bulk food (such as hay).

It's recommended to remove the muzzle and horse/pony from the grass and feed hay overnight.

**Provide forage enrichment** by growing or allowing access to herbs, shrubs and trees that are safe for horses. If you don't have those growing on your property, you can bring them in to hang on fences or in nets, lay logs on the ground for them to chew bark and supply dried herbs in some chaff.

*Willow branches in a net provides forage enrichment.*



# Your Horse is What it Eats

**Encourage more movement** by fencing a 10–20m wide **track around your pasture** which makes a long, thin paddock and restricts grass intake without reducing movement like small 'starvation' paddocks do.

Try to feed as far from the water source as possible to increase movement. Systems such as **Equicentral** are also a great way to manage feed and water resources, and encourage movement.

Keeping your horse in a herd or at least with another active companion will also increase movement as they travel to and from water, feed and enrichment such as hay nets placed well apart from other resources and resting areas.

As you can see there are many ways in which we can improve the way we feed and provide nutrition for our equines which will in turn save us money via reduced vet bills, and improve their physical and mental well-being.



# Minerals, Vitamins and Supplements



*Supplements can improve coat colour and condition – the horse on the left was fed supplements from the Natural Horse World Store.*

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Minerals can be one of the most confusing aspects of feeding horses.

How do you know which ones to use? Or which brands are best, or even if your horse needs them?

Here are some reasons for feeding supplements:

**1. The pasture/hay** might not be providing the right balance of minerals or enough to keep your horse healthy, especially if the soil is depleted. Horses deficient in minerals often show signs in their coat and hoof health, with skin conditions, faded coat colour and hoof wall cracks good indicators that something is lacking.

**2. The mineral/vitamin needs** of a horse vary according to age, health, workload and whether they are breeding or lactating. A pasture pet may get by with just a salt lick but if you don't want problems to arise when the horse is expected to do something, then supplements are a must.

**3. Supplements in prepared feeds** aren't always enough and aren't balanced to the roughage your horse gets which should be 80% of the diet. Unless you feed the exact specified amount on the bag the mineral/vitamin intake for this portion of the diet is reduced.

# Minerals, vitamins and Supplements

**4. Free choice minerals or licks** can not always be relied upon to provide everything the horse needs. Minerals are generally unpalatable except for salt which horses will seek out themselves and should be available in loose form at all times. Licks may not give adequate intake especially in hot climates or when the horse sweats.

Licks have molasses added to get horses to lick/eat them but they still won't take in enough on their own especially when the horse is low in the pecking order and by the time they get a turn at the lick, the rest of the herd may decide to move on, so they feel the need to go with them.

**5. Health problems** may benefit from specific supplements for example horses suffering from stringhalt respond well to magnesium as do those with laminitis or behavioural issues caused by the toxins in some grasses such as rye and kikuyu. 'Big head' and facial bone bumps indicate a need for additional calcium and 'tying up' could indicate a need for Vitamin E and Selenium.

While I am not qualified to tell you which supplements to use and indeed there are so many variables, you need to research what supplementation each horse requires.

My aim is to simply to raise awareness about a subject that is sometimes neglected or ignored because its all too hard.

With the ability to search for information so easily on the internet these days, there's really no excuse for not looking into what your horse might require for optimal health.

There is also a wealth of knowledge and advice available from independent [Equine Nutritionists](#) at very reasonable rates, and well researched books such as [Natural Horse Care The Right Way](#) giving good advice.

# Mineral Feeding Options

So, if you want a healthy horse you need a consistent supply of **minerals** – feed something – its better than nothing!

Here are a few examples of how horse owners approach the mineral puzzle:

- 'I feed the same as my friends do' – Is your horse and property exactly the same as your friend's?
- 'What minerals? My horses should get all they need from the pasture' – what if the pasture is lacking?
- 'I get whatever the local feed store recommends or has on special' – How do you know it is the right one for your horse at their stage of life?
- 'Isn't that what a salt lick is for?' – Yes, but horses will need more than salt especially if they are working, breeding or growing.
- 'I only give them minerals if they have a problem or look deficient' – It can take a while for problems to show up, and for them to be corrected.
- 'I read up on it and mix my own depending on what I can afford and what my horses need' – That's probably ok if you've done an equine nutrition course!
- 'I get an equine nutritionist to formulate a diet for me and that includes minerals' – Excellent!
- 'I feed a commercial horse mix and that has minerals added' – That's ok if you feed the recommended daily amount which is often too much for most horses, and if the feed mix is appropriate for the life stage or work your horse is doing.

# Mineral Feeding Options -

There are so many different approaches to feeding minerals and what to feed that it pays to do your research, keep up to date with new information, find what works for your horses and how best to give them access to minerals.



As you can see there are many and varied approaches, some good and some not.

Minerals are manufactured in the soil so where your horse's feed is grown will dictate the minerals it has. If your horse is mainly pastured it's a good idea to have your soil tested and if it's lacking, then address that by supplementing the pasture as well as the horse.

Be extremely cautious when supplementing minerals to your horse as one mineral may interfere with the absorption of others and imbalances and toxic levels may occur. It's best to use a **balanced mineral mix** with feeds that aren't pre-mixed (that include minerals).

Minerals can be organic or inorganic. Organic minerals are simply substances that are bonded to an organic material. In the old days, these types of minerals were referred to as chelates, but you may now also see names such as proteinate, or a description of the organic mineral such as polysaccharide mineral complex. Inorganic versions of these compounds are usually referred to as sulfates or oxides.

Organic minerals properly supplied with a balanced diet prevent muscle abnormalities, developmental orthopedic disease, and other health issues. Problems may arise when the minerals are not adequately metabolized by the horse. This is rarely the case with the organic minerals.

# Mineral Feeding Options -

There are many natural sources of minerals and vitamins that we can supplement with little detrimental affect. These include kelp, rosehips, dolomite, apple cider vinegar and sea salt.

“So what is the best way to do that?” I hear you say.

It really depends on your situation, how you feed and what you supplement with.

If you are bucket feeding a performance horse or breeding stock, then adding supplements to their feed is easy – but be careful what you’re giving doesn’t conflict with any prepared feed mixes.

Be aware that almost all prepared feed and mineral mixes are designed for the ‘average’ type of horse on the ‘average’ type of soil. You need to know what your soil is lacking in, and supplement with that. Or in some cases your horse may show some reliable physical signs such as a faded, curly on the ends coat indicating a copper deficiency, or erratic behaviour in spring when the grass is at it’s richest indicating more magnesium needed.

But what if your horse lives in a herd and doesn’t need regular bucket feeds?

Then feeding minerals as often as you can is better than none at all, or offer them free choice.

There are a couple of ways to do this – take a selection of supplements like the natural ones suggested above, out to the horse each day in a small bucket and leave it with them while the weather is fine. These supplements are ususally too expensive to risk being ruined by rain.

This method will suit the ‘at home’ horse owner who can retrieve the buckets or just leave them with the horses to take what they need while they attend to grooming or paddock maintenance.

# Mineral Feeding Options

For those that don't have the luxury of living with their horses it's easier to have free choice minerals under cover either in a shelter shed or if you haven't got one of those, make something up like the apple bin above converted to hold the minerals. Facing it away from the prevailing weather will protect the contents.

Whatever form of feeding minerals you adopt, remember that horses always need free choice salt so it is imperative to supply a block to lick or if you can keep it under cover, loose or rock salt.

Many mineral or salt licks can contain a high amount of molasses that encourages the horse to gorge and costs you a fortune, so look for blocks that contain 3% molasses or less.

Another highly recommended site is [www.balancedequine.com.au](http://www.balancedequine.com.au) where you can get a feeding plan done to optimize the minerals needed to make up for those lacking in the feed.

Carol Layton of Balanced Equine offers independent nutritional advice and mineral balanced diets.

Also – Katy Watts from [www.safergrass.org](http://www.safergrass.org) has a new CD on Minerals so go to her web site for lots of good info or to purchase a copy.

[Understanding Beet Pulp as an Equine Feed](#) – click the link to read this article which explains how beet pulp becomes an equine feed and why it is so useful.

# Why Do I need to Know About Grass?

Grass is one of those things we take for granted if we have it, and wish we had it if we don't, especially in times of drought.

If we have a paddock full of lush grass we think our horses are lucky.

But did you know grass can be just as harmful for your horse as much as it's helpful in providing nutrients?

Recent research by people such as Kathryn Watts from Colorado, has revealed that grass can cause our horse to show slight lameness, shortness of stride, tie-up (azoturia) after exercise, contribute to 'Cushing's Syndrome' and hoof abscesses, and of course, cause laminitis and founder.



Many of our horses probably die early or are 'put down' because of the problems they develop from eating grass either at the wrong time of the day or year, or the wrong type of grass. In fact it has been proven that animals who have their intake of calories restricted by 30-40% live a lot longer.

In other words, people love their horses so much they feed them 'to death'.

One of the most common reasons for horses to be retired or euthanised is irreparable lameness and it's estimated that 80% of horses in the world show some form of clinical lameness.

# Why Do I need to Know About Grass? -

Most of these lamenesses originate in the lower 1/3rd of the leg with a very high percentage in the hoof from 'diseases' such as navicular and laminitis, abscesses and seedy toe (or white line disease).

While some stresses to the hoof such as navicular are related more to the hoof form being out of shape due to shoeing and bad/neglectful trimming, most others can be controlled through diet. Laminitis, seedy toe and the abscesses that result from the hoof trying to rid itself of toxins can all be fixed with a careful diet that controls the damage done to the laminae inside the hoof.

Damage to the sensitive laminae cause them to separate and destroy the bond between the inner hoof structures and the outer hoof wall. When this bond is broken, lameness occurs as it is a bit like us tearing a fingernail from the skin below – it gets pretty sensitive until it can grow more tissue and heal.

As the torn laminae grow down with the hoof wall towards the ground, the dead tissue spaces (separation of the hoof wall) allows bacteria to enter and then you have seedy toe or white line disease.

Abscesses commonly occur to rid the hoof of the dead tissue from within, especially when the horse has suffered laminitis and a large amount of toxins must be removed. When the blood flow that carries these toxins away from the hoof is compromised by shoeing or lack of movement such as when the horse is footsore and cannot move much, then an abscess is the only way to force the toxins out.

So what has this all got to do with grass I hear you say?

Well, grass manufactures sugars in the form of non-structural carbohydrates (NSC) and when these sugars overload the horse's hind gut, in simple terms, it causes the gut to release toxins into the blood which then flows to the hooves and effects the laminae as described above.

# Why Do I need to know about grass?

So, if we know how to limit the NSC to a safe level, then we can save our horse from a lot of suffering and save ourselves from a lot of vet bills.

Most people already realise that a horse who gets into the grain bin and gorges, will founder, as do ponies on rich grass in spring time.

This is the extreme end of the scale, but if we are more aware of what is happening to our horse's hooves, they will show us that minor episodes of laminitis (a major episode is called founder) are happening in response to the grass or concentrate feed our horse is eating.

Commonly, horses become sensitive in their hooves when they have a minor laminitic attack. You may notice your horse is reluctant to move forward, takes short steps or 'plays up' when asked to circle.

They will be footsore on gravel or rocky surfaces, always looking for the edge where the grass grows or the going is softer. That's what makes most horse owners reach for the phone to call their farrier to put shoes on, when in reality they should be restricting grass intake and buying a set of boots to help protect the hooves in a healthy way when they want to ride.

Some footsoreness can be due to lack of good hoof form ie; flat soles therefore sensitive, but this is also just another symptom of mild laminitis. The soles appear to have dropped but what's really happening is the hoof wall is separating and growing forward from the coffin bone because of a weak laminar attachment, causing the sole and coffin bone to become weight bearing and therefore sensitive to direct pressure.

As you can see, the root cause of many hoof problems and therefore soundness, is the damage to the laminae which is like velcro – it holds the hoof together.

# Why do I need to know about grass?

The cause of damage to the laminae is commonly the toxins released from the horse's hind gut in response to an overload of sugar.

The sugar overload comes from a high level of sugar or NSC in the grasses the horse eats (even in the dried grass – hay) which is the reason we need to know more about grass.

We need to know when it is safe to allow the horse to eat grass or when the grass has a low level of NSC's.

We need to know what types of grasses have lower levels of NSC and which ones have a higher amount – usually those developed for the beef and dairy industries to grow lots of muscle, fat and milk.

We need to know what affects the NSC content of grasses – like the weather, fertilisers used, when it is cut for hay etc.

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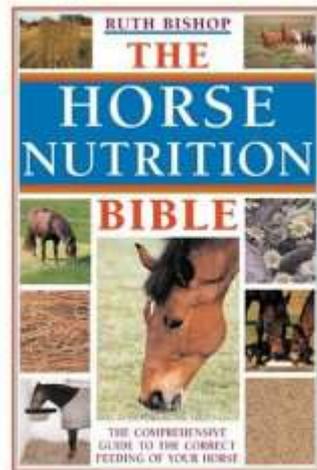
So what is toxic grass?

Any grass under stress or climatic conditions such as those of early spring and autumn, especially in drought-breaking rains or cool, cloudy, wet weather, including frosts, is subject to acute spikes of potassium and nitrate at the same time becoming low in sodium. This is exacerbated by nitrogenous fertilisers.

The potassium nitrate ingested is highly toxic and the body eliminates it by latching on to calcium and magnesium so is excreted with them. Hence the necessity to feed adequate calcium/magnesium and sodium while not adding to the potassium load with lucerne/molasses, many herbs/garlic/high protein feeds/supplements containing potassium.

For more information on grasses go to [www.safergrass.org](http://www.safergrass.org)

# Horse Behaviour Linked to Poor Nutrition



*Get good advice on nutrition from books like this one.*

Natural nutrition must be our first priority for keeping a horse healthy, both physically and mentally. Many health issues can be attributed to poor nutrition and that includes behavioural problems.

Back in the days when I was instructing full time, I used to think 'training' could solve almost all issues.

Then I realised you couldn't train a horse effectively if it was feeling pain in it's feet, from poor saddle fit or from the bit, or any other kind of physical pain for that matter. And then I discovered another problem that caused negative behaviour – chronic mineral imbalance.

I have come to realise that even more issues are the result of the grass we allow our horses to eat, combined with imbalances or lack of certain minerals. Or the massive imbalance that rapidly growing grass can cause in Autumn and Spring, it has been widely reconised in cattle as grass tetany but until recently it has not been recognised or proven in horses.

# Horse Behaviour Linked to Poor Nutrition -

So many people struggle with horses that are over-excitabile, nervous, jumpy, suffer separation anxiety, have a sour attitude, can't move forward, and are generally uncontrollable, and think that better training will fix the horse.

Sure, some horses can be 'trained into submission' with various techniques but that just causes the horse to shut down eventually – it doesn't solve the cause of the problem.

Are these behavioural issues? What has changed in the horse's life?

First, its best to check that pain isn't causing a problem, then look at any changes made to their diet:

- 1/ Have they moved to a new paddock
- 2/ Is the grass short and under stress?
- 3/ Been fed something different such as ryegrass or clover hay?
- 4/ Their living situation, have they been removed from the herd, or lost a herd member?
- 5/ Has a particular grass such as Rye Grass, Clover, Paspalum, Couch Grass, Phalaris (Blue Canary grass), Cat's ear flat weed (looks like dandelion), Tall Fescue in reasonable amounts in the paddock?
- 6/ Has a weed increased, such as Cape weed, Patersons cures, St John's Wart, Fire weed, Poison buttercup, or Deadly night shade?
- 7/ Have you changed or cut out the vitamin and mineral supplement you feed in the past 2-3 months?
- 8/ Or have you made changes to the equipment you use (new saddle, bridle, pad, girth etc?).

Any or all of these can affect a horse's behaviour.

So if you've changed your horse's diet, then that could be the cause – especially if you've moved them to a fresh pasture, and especially if that pasture has grass that is toxic.

# Horse Behaviour Linked to Poor Nutrition -

Grass that is too high in sugars (NSC's – Non Structural Carbohydrates) such as rye grass, or has oxalates (binds up calcium) such as Kikuyu, Setaria, Buffel, Green Panic, Pangola, Para Grass, Guinea Grass, Signal Grass and Purple Pigeon grass, or has mycotoxins that are produced by endophytes in grasses such as rye and paspalum, or has moulds/pollens or is drought stressed, is toxic.

It's also a good idea to find out from your local Department of Primary Industries what weeds are prevalent in your area that could be dangerous to horses.

Grass is a huge topic and I recommend you start by reading the article further down this page – 'Why do I need to know about grass' then, Jenny Patersons' web site [Calm Healthy Horses](#). It has a huge amount of information on the physical and behavioural issues that come from grazing the wrong types of grasses for horses.

In the past week I've had two people contact me about their geldings behaving like stallions and others noticing their horses have 'changed' and are becoming pushy and not listening.

Clover is implicated here because it contains phyto-estrogens that upset hormones and also contains pigments that lead to photosensitivity which looks like mud fever (greasy heel) and sunburn.

The best way to figure out if grass is implicated in behavioural issues is to remove the horse from the grass, feed non-rye/clover/paspalum grass hay and supplements to assist with correcting mineral imbalances that can exaggerate the behaviour.

[Here are some wonderful success stories](#) of horses and ponies who have overcome major behavioural and physical problems by changing their diet.

# Horse Behaviour Linked to Poor Nutrition -

*Missy more relaxed with magnesium supplement*

And here's how magnesium supplementation helped Missy.

"I started using Alleviate on my gelding in autumn and found he was not as stressed about leaving his mare behind when I took him for a ride.

I was so happy with Alleviate, I decided to start my mare (Missy – pictured here) on it.

She has had a great fear of being tied up from previous negative experiences, and as soon as we would approach the tie up rail in the past she was tense and stressed out and would run backwards.

Amazingly, after three weeks on Alleviate I am now able to drape the rope over the rail and brush her without any anxiety at all. I would recommend it to anyone."

Vanessa Macdonald, Tas.

[The Natural Horse World Store](#) stocks a range of herbal products that may help with behavioural and nutritional issues.

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# Barefoot Hoofcare



*Kaya and her lovely Pippin.*

By [Kaya Femmerling \(Dec.\)](#)

Horses are born without shoes. From day one they are equipped with the most magnificent 'Life'-structure at the end of their legs, the Equine Hoof. With their natural hardy hooves horses are able to cover 30– 70 Km per day, as they travel in their herd, foraging for sparse native grasses.

The horse is an animal of the wide open steppes. The horse is a prey animal, and healthy tough hooves are needed for it to survive.

Remember the saying?! – 'No Hoof– No Horse!'

Between the wild horse in its natural habitat, and our domesticated horses, having to live under artificial conditions, in confinement and horse stables or small paddocks, yes, there is big difference.

But, the horse HAS NOT changed genetically since man domesticated the horse!

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

Horses have evolved for millions of years on this planet, do you really think they can change genetically, just over the few thousands of years, since man domesticated them? The answer is NO.

Our pony in the back yard is genetically exactly the same horse as its cousin in the wild, and has exactly the same needs, physically and emotionally, as its cousin in the wild.



Most arguments against Natural Horse Keeping and Natural Hoof Care (barefootedness) are based on the idea of our domesticated horse and ponies having different needs to the needs of the wild horse.

But the 'facts' and statistics show a different reality. Most of the horse's health problems encountered today are caused by not respecting and catering for the horse's physical and emotional needs.

Horses and ponies suffer from colic, lameness issues, hoof problems, sore backs, laminitis, founder, injuries etc.

Where do these diseases come from?

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

However horse/pony owners can make a big difference for our equine friends. We can study and learn and inform ourselves, to provide our horses and ponies with as near as natural conditions as possible.

How about we model our ideal horse keeping after the healthy habitat of the wild horse, as nature intended horses to live.

You can also call it: 'Create a little bit of Arizona in the middle of Belgium'...

What do horses and ponies need to stay healthy and happy, physically as well as mentally?

Our horse / pony needs:

- lots of space to move and run freely
- horse company / a herd of horses for emotional safety and the incentive to move
- shelter, in case of bad weather
- fresh clean water to drink
- water to hydrate its hooves (foot bath, dam, muddy area...)
- a diet rich in hardy fibre, low in sugar and starch, minerals and vitamins
- dry hard rocky ground to regularly walk on. When you look at the health of your horse's/pony's feet and hooves, you have to look at its environmental living conditions and its diet for they are linked. If you want your pony/horse to have healthy tough hooves, you need to look at 'the whole horse' and provide for its needs!

The Unshod Horse – **The history of the horse shoe:**

Horses have lived on this planet for millions of years and have been domesticated since about 8000 years.

# Barefoot Hoofcare -



They originated from areas that were rugged mountains, semi-arid regions, steppes and deserts.

Once the wild horses were domesticated and made their way into the hands of Northern European tribes of people, they found themselves in a much wetter, colder climate than they originally came from. They partially adapted to this climate.

By 700AD, when castles were built for security from their rival kingdoms, horses started to be kept in small paddocks and stables, standing in their own excrement.

The hooves, lacking proper circulation to form good healthy horn, and additionally weakened by ammonia, were no longer able to bear up to use on rocky terrain (in contrast to the hooves of those horses still kept in large open spaces).

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

It was the horses of the princesses and kings, who lived in the castles, that were shod to protect the hooves from excessive wear.

The horses of the vassals and the common folk, still living more naturally, did not have (or need) shoes. But, as in human nature, those things used by the 'rich and famous' quickly become more desirable to the 'common man'...

Kingdoms became cities, horses became more useful and started to have 'working lives'.

Horses started to be shod with metal shoes about 1000 years ago and since then it became a common practice.

This means that the huge migrations of tribes and the endless cavalry warfare of early history (Ghengis Khan, Alexander the Great, Hannibal etc.) took place with riders on unshod horses, their horses/ponies crossed whole continents barefooted!

Stabling practices and metal shoeing was the beginning of the deterioration of the hooves of domesticated horses.

Once the automobiles and tractors replaced the 'working horse' in the last century, and horses became 'pleasure animals', they remained in close confinement and still were and even nowadays are still shod with metal shoes.

Why do we still shoe our horses?

In my practice as a professional Natural Hoof Care Practitioner I hear the following answers and arguments on a daily base:

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

- 'I want to protect my horse/pony from wearing its hooves'
- 'My horse is a TB/ WB/ Arab/QH /heavy/ light... horse/pony and has flat/ brittle/ terrible/ club foot/ splayfoot / cracked/ split/ chipped etc. hooves...'
- 'My horse/pony is a PERFORMANCE (!) horse ... '
- 'To get better traction'
- 'My horse/pony is sore/tender footed and tippi-toey on gravel when barefoot'
- 'My horse/pony needs shoes because my farrier/vet/instructor/dressage judge said so'
- 'Because I always shod my horses and they seemed fine'
- 'Because horses have always been shod and they will always be shod and that is the end of the story...'
- 'Because I am too lazy/ don't have the time to put on hoof boots every time I want to ride'
- 'I don't want to upset / loose my farrier, I want to be loyal to him'
- 'My farrier is old-fashioned and says 'all horse need to be shod''
- 'I can't find a qualified well educated barefoot trimmer in my area and my farrier is close minded and doesn't want to learn proper barefoot trimming, he says 'a pasture trim will do''
- 'My horse/pony doesn't show the elevation while riding dressage'
- 'The difference between a domesticated horse and a wild horse is that the domesticated horse has carry more weight (a rider), that is why it needs shoes'(... ever thought of a pregnant mare 'having to wear shoes' because she is carrying extra heavy weight (her foal), or of shoeing a well rounded pony at the end of the summer season with its extra heavy 'tummy-bulk' to survive the coming winter...?)

What if these answers are only old paradigms and excuses we have – because we have forgotten or overlooked the fact that the horse was born with all the footwear it ever needs and that horses were commonly shod only since the Middle Ages.

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

Horses however survived the last 55 million years without metal nailed to their feet and under much more difficult circumstances than in any domestic situation they have had to face in the past 5000 years since.

So, 'domestication' or the fact that horses are ridden is NOT a valid argument for shoeing.

Wouldn't it be nice if you could care for your horse's hooves in a much easier, healthier way? Never to worry about a thrown shoe again?

'Shoeing – the necessary Evil' ?!

Ever since horse shoes have existed it has been noticed that, within a few years of being shod, the horse began to display sickness and diseases previously unknown in unshod horses.

This is why, even in the very first books mentioning shoeing (from the 17th century and earlier), the horse shoe has always been referred to as a "necessary evil".



# Barefoot Hoofcare -

## **The harmful and damaging effects of shoeing:**

- Prevents hoof wall from wear, the wall grows longer than it ever would in nature, causing unnatural forces and tension within the hoof capsule, leading to cracks, chips, seedy toe, white line separation and abscesses.
- Stumbling horse, with a shoe the horse can no longer clearly feel the ground it walks on.
- Vibration and impact on weight bearing destroys hoof wall and damages living tissue.
- Impairs shock absorption and movement of the sole.
- Impairs the hoof mechanism and the circulatory pump (blood circulation from the hooves/legs back to the heart, heart has to work 4 X harder).
- Pinching of corium and living tissues in the hoof.
- Unnatural strain on ligaments and joints.
- Bruising of navicular area (= heel pain) and hoof / heel contraction.
- Thrush, with the lack of blood circulation to the frog and sweat glands may be
  - disrupted severely enough to cause thrush.
- Unnatural weight and centrifugal forces on the hoof.
- Nails destroy the hoof wall.
- Nails conduct cold and heat into the interior of the hoof.
- Shoes have a negative effect on meridians, reflex zones, electrical and magnetic fields of the hoof and corium.
- Increased risk of greater injury and damage, the horse, which is shod, can cause to itself, other horses and humans.
- Shoeing contracts and deforms the hoof over time, even the bones inside the hoof.
- Prevents proper development of a young horses foot.

## **'Orthopedic' or 'corrective' shoeing is not possible.**

Shoes cause so much damage inside the hoof that it can't be used for healing, shoes reduce the blood flow inside the hoof, but any healing needs to be supported by strong blood circulation.

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

But then why, if shoeing truly has these adverse side effects and causes all this damage inside the hoof, are there still any shod horses out there that are labelled 'sound'?

On its own, any harmful effects of shoeing may go un-noticed for years. The damage, of course, is still being done inside the shod hooves.

But the horse is sound, despite this, because it is actually unable to detect the damage, since the nerves in the affected areas are unable to function properly, they are literally 'numb'. The horse can't feel its pain...

## **What are the functions of the Hoof?**



Rather than simply a lump of dead horn at the end of the horse's leg, the hoof is a very complex organ which performs a variety of functions vital to the horse's overall health and survival.

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

- \*Protection from external mechanical forces.
- \*Traction, secure footing on all terrains
- \*Shock absorption
- \* Heart-supporting circulatory blood pump (healthy hoof mechanism)

All of the above mentioned functions of the hoof are clearly impaired if metal shoes = metal cages are nailed onto the living hoof.

**What is the alternative?** Natural Horse Care and Barefoot Trimming!

Nowadays more and more people are starting to realize that a change of keeping and shoeing their horses is needed – and possible!

'Natural Hoof Care/ Barehoof Care' is a new term, being used to describe the care and use of barefooted horses in all disciplines including high performance horses. Nowadays some endurance performance horses successfully complete the Australian 160km Tom Quilty Cup barefooted!

Natural Hoofcare is not just a trimming method, it is also a complete care system that allows a horse to remain barefoot through its entire life.

The same system can be used to rehabilitate horses from many degenerative lameness problems, incl. laminitis/founder and navicular disease.

A proper 'Barefoot Trim' is a 'physiologically correct' trim, which respects the internal structures of the hoof and provides proper hoof mechanism and function, to not only maximise circulation to the inner structures of the hoof, but also – like muscular movement – to assist the heart in pumping blood.

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

A 'Barefoot Trim', based on the wild horse's hoof, is different to the 'normal' farrier's 'Pasture Trim'.

A 'Pasture Trim' is a hoof trim which is the PREPARATION of the hoof for a shoe to be nailed on, but, in the end, the shoe is not nailed on and the horse is left barefoot.

Can you expect a hoof to stay sound which is just trimmed in one flat plane?  
No.



*A wild brumby hoof.*



*Wild brumby hoof showing the distinctive rolled toe, short heel and straight dorsal hoof wall.*

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

A proper 'Barefoot Trim', modelled on the wild horse's hoof, has distinctive characteristics:

- short toe.
- low heels (level with base of frog and base of heel bulbs)
- arch in the quarters
- frog is left thick, wide and weight bearing
- strong curved bars (non-weight bearing when horse is stationary)
- bevel (roll) at the base of the hoof wall (the famous 'Mustang Roll') that allows perfect break over at toe and prevents any impacting rocks from creating cracks
- good sole concavity, healthy solar vault
- no flares/ no toe pillars/ no cracks
- dense well connected white line
- thick tough sole callus at toe, protective sole
- Every domesticated horse/pony should have its hooves regularly barefoot trimmed at approximately 4-5 weekly intervals.

## **Transition period:**

Now, if you decide to take off your horse's shoes, your horse will go through what is called a 'Transition Period'.

This is the time between shoe removal and your horse comfortably walking on hard rocky ground.

You can't expect your horse to walk comfortably instantly after shoe removal. Most hooves are so degenerated, the soles are so thin, that they need some time to heal and adjust and again grow a strong protective sole callous.

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

This period can take between a few weeks and several months, depending on the individual horse.

Meanwhile, to make your horse comfortable and encourage it to walk a lot, your horse/ pony can be fitted with hoof boots. It is that easy.

What else can I do to help my horse?

Natural Hoof Care is 'preventative care'...

## **Environment:**

It is important that your horse, in its daily life, living in its paddock/yard, is exposed to the ground it is expected to be ridden on.



Put rocks/gravel around your water and feeding troughs, cover areas where you horse normally walks through with rocks (in gateway areas), to give the hooves a chance to harden and toughen up.

## **Movement:**

Walk and work your horse as much as possible, movement brings blood into the horse's hooves and allows for strong healthy tough callus growth.

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

## **Diet:**

Feed your pony/ horse only low sugar feed, lots and lots of fibre, limit fresh grass intake (unless it is native grass) and cut out any sweet feed, grains, molasses and fruit.

## **Hoof Trimming:**

Take care that your horse/pony is regularly trimmed by a Natural Hoof Care Practitioner who is trained in proper barefoot trimming, or ask your farrier to familiarize him/herself with, and learn proper barefoot trimming techniques.

Say goodbye to farriers who don't want to update their trimming skills and who put barefoot trimming down as a 'fashion-frill'.

Your horse has the right to have its hooves trimmed by a trained professional.

Barefooting takes care and commitment. It WILL make your horse/pony healthier, sounder, perform better, have less pain and it will help it to live a longer and happier life.

Once your pony's/horse's hoof starts to look like a wild horse's hoof, it will start to act like one!

Your horse will thank you.

Still unsure?

Check out these web pages for more information:

[www.hoofrehab.com](http://www.hoofrehab.com) – Pete Ramey's web page, USA

[www.wildabouthooves.com.au](http://www.wildabouthooves.com.au) – Jeremy Ford and Jen Clingly's site, Australia

[www.hoofworksaustralia.com](http://www.hoofworksaustralia.com) – Peter Laidley's web page, Australia

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

[www.easycaredownunder.com.au](http://www.easycaredownunder.com.au) – Hoof Boots, Australia

[www.tribeequus.com](http://www.tribeequus.com) – High performance barefootedness

[www.aebm.org.au](http://www.aebm.org.au) – Australian Equine Barefoot Movement

[barefoothorse.com](http://barefoothorse.com) – One of the most comprehensive barefoot trimming sites with lots of 'how to' information from Marjorie Smith – also translated into 13 different languages!



*Kaya and Pippin*

I recommend the following books for reading:

'[Horse Owner's Guide to Natural Hoof Care](#)' by Jamie Jackson '[Making Natural Hoof Care work for You](#)' by Pete Ramey.

Owning two Highland ponies myself, I have to say that I have never come across a horse breed with tougher stronger hooves than the Highland's.

If given the proper environment, care, diet and regular barefoot trimming, there is absolutely no need to shoe these ponies, they have the best feet!

I feel truly lucky that I came across the Highland Pony breed.

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

**Kaya Femerling** – Certified ACEHP Hoof Care Practitioner.  
Highland Pony Photos by Sue Jarman of Rosemarkie Stud.

To learn how to become an Equine Hoofcare Practitioner [click here](#)

To find a Certified Hoofcare Professional in Australia [Click Here](#)

More Natural Hoofcare Articles -  
click on the heading to read the article online.



**How to Avoid Laminitis**-The two most dangerous times for laminitis are in the spring and autumn, depending on where you live. Cooler climates and high altitudes can increase the potential for laminitis as the day and night temperatures fluctuate, along with the amount of sunlight and daylight hours. For example, if you live in the southern states of Australia, northern [...]

**How Minerals Affect Horses Hooves**-By Carol Layton – Balanced Equine There are many factors that influence the type of hoof a horse will have; these include genes, type of environment, amount of movement, quality of hoof care, especially in the early years of a horse's development and nutrition. No one factor on its own can produce the best possible [...]

# Barefoot Hoofcare -

**Make Your Own Safe Hoof Stand**-This safe and easy to make hoof stand was put together from items you can find at most recycling shops or even



found around your own place. To start with you need a removeable agitator from the centre of an older style washing machine – the larger ones are better as they have a larger,....



**Hoof Abscess – when being 'kind' is cruel**-While reading the book 'Perfect Partners' by Kelly Marks (an excellent book by the way) I was struck by a very true statement she made.... "Well meaning is not the same as well being for the horse". One of the ways we tend to show good care for our horse is to provide plenty of [...]



**A CURE FOR SEEDY TOE**-Seedy toe seems to be one of the most common afflictions to a horse's hooves and can best be described as a fungal infection which enters through the white line where it has been weakened either by excess hoof growth, horse shoe nails or sub-clinical laminitis. It gets its name from most commonly being found [...]



# Barefoot Hoofcare -

**Easy Hoof Bath to Make in Minutes**-With the current drought a hoof bath for daily soaking will not only keep your horse's hooves healthy and supple, but easier to trim too. Here is an inexpensive version that takes minutes to put together once you have the following materials on hand; 4 poles or 'sleepers' – 2 long ones approx. 2m and [...]



**Donkey Hooves — A Hoof Trimmer's Perspective © Glenn Wilson May 2010** - "The best way to forget all your troubles is to wear tight shoes". The donkey and horse version of the above is, "If my feet hurt then I feel like crap". The reality is that too many donkeys and horses suffer bad hooves – and they needn't – so their behaviour is affected. It is [...]



**Carla's Rescue by TAFE Hoof Care Course – Oct. 2007**-Fortunately for Carla, the 12 year old shetland pony mare, her condition was discovered just prior to the TAFE Hoof Care Course. Her sad situation provided the ideal opportunity for the students to observe how to assess, trim and treat a pony with hooves in such bad shape. Carla's hooves were first x-rayed by vet [...]

## Learning Hoof Care -

Learning hoof care may not even be on your radar. For some, caring for their horse's hooves involves the occasional check, clean and a visit from the farrier/barefoot trimmer/equine podiatrist every month or two. Others like myself are trimming their own horses to either save money or be more responsible for their horse's care overall. [...]

# Natural Horse Health Care -



*This wound was healed successfully with honey.*

Horses will always present us with health problems so the following natural health care articles will help you treat some common conditions using natural, cost effective therapies.

Remember to always seek veterinary advice or diagnosis first before applying your own treatment, and/or consult an alternative therapist to guide you.

You will find more natural therapies outlined on the [Alternative Therapies page](#) and advice on worming which should be part of every health care program on [this page](#).

I'm a big believer in being prepared and forewarned so apart from a fully stocked first aid kit, it's important to have some good books on veterinary care.

One of the best I've read is All Horse Systems Go by Nancy Loving DVM, available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or [www.fishpond.com.au](http://www.fishpond.com.au)

Another book she has co-authored is a handy size to carry in your first aid kit – called 'First Aid for the Horse and Rider' – Nancy Loving and Gilbert Preston.

# First Aid Kit for Horses -

This list includes each item's use and where to buy the supplies.

Remember, if you have a first aid kit and some good first aid books, you can do something for your horse until the vet arrives.

If you would rather purchase a ready made Horse Care Kit like the one pictured below go to the [Equine Care Clinic here](#).



## Items available from a Homeopath or Pharmacy:

- Rescue Remedy drops (for any kind of trauma or shock)
- Homeopathic Apis (for insect bites and stings)
- Arnica ointment & drops (for bruising, hematomas and sprains)
- Aloe Vera gel (soothing for burns and wounds)
- Savlon liquid or iodine – 7-10% solution should be diluted 1-3 parts water.
- Hydrogen Peroxide – 3% solution (for cleaning puncture wounds)
- Antibacterial hand wash
- Large Padded wound cover
- Space blanket (handy if you're travelling)
- Blunt nose scissors

# Natural Horse Health Care -

## **Items available from a supermarket**

- Natural salt – to make a wound cleaning solution add ½ tablespoon to 1 litre of water
- Absorbent pads (the type women use) and disposable nappies (for poultices)
- Washing cloths or gauze sponges for cleaning wounds
- Clean towel
- Disposable gloves
- Tweezers
- Pen, pencil & notebook (for recording vital info and times until the vet arrives)
- Electrical tape & duct tape
- Torch – manual charging or with fresh batteries
- A plastic container with a lid to hold the first aid kit contents – this can also double as a dispensary tray (lid) and clean bucket (for washing solution).

## **Available from your vet supply store or saddlery store**

- Vet wrap elastic bandage roll
- Elasto-plast adhesive bandage roll
- Animalintex poultice (for leg swellings)
- Large roll of cotton wool – to pad wounds
- Paraffin gauze or other non-stick wound cover
- Plain gauze dressing pads
- Digital thermometer
- Stethoscope
- Scalpel
- Various sized syringes (for wound/eye irrigation)
- Hoof pick
- Instant cold/hot pack
- Your Vet's phone numbers (listed so others using your kit can easily find)

# Natural Horse Health Care -

A Record of your Horse's normal vital signs (Heart rate, respiration, temperature) written on a card or in a notebook.

## HEALING TREATMENTS

Apart from the items above, here are some of the other healing treatments I like to keep in my First Aid kit for follow up use.

### Available from Pharmacies

- Manuka Honey (for treating wounds, especially where proud flesh is evident)
- Comfrey ointment (for treating bone injuries)
- Tea Tree oil (for wounds)
- Colloidal silver (antibacterial for internal and external use)

### Available from veterinary supplies/Saddleries

- Filtabac ointment (antibacterial sunscreen for wounds and white noses)
- Stockholm Tar/Pine Tar (for seedy toe)
- Fly Repellent ointment (to put around open wounds)



**Teeth Check Time**-One of the few things horses and humans have in common is the need for annual check up with the dentist. In days gone by the farrier also practiced horse dentistry so it was easy to slot in a quick check of the teeth when he visited on a regular basis. But now horse dentistry [...]



**Heel wound healed with honey-**

# Natural Horse Health Care -

When my quarter horse mare injured her heel (probably from a wire cut) it wasn't possible to stitch this constantly moving and flexing part, so here's the treatment process I followed to completely heal this wound. Honey treatment started 2 days after the initial treatment with hydrogen peroxide to flush it clean twice daily as [...]



**Leg wound Healed with Honey**-This foal fell over a fence and tore the skin, leaving a wound difficult to stitch. With the application of honey under a bandage from the first 10 days, then without the bandage, it healed nicely. Arabian foal's foreleg wound day 2 (left), then one week after being bandaged with honey (right). The wound has [...]



**-THE HEALING POWER OF HONEY on Severe Wounds** I'm always looking for natural alternatives when it comes to treating horses and I believe they can work well in conjunction with modern medicine. A while ago now, I had a yearling filly (Ruby) badly injured from wire cuts. She had severed the flexor (front) tendons on her off fore and near [...]



**-Stringhalt in horses is a seasonal condition.**In Australia, stringhalt in horses is commonly seen in summer and autumn as drought stressed pastures are overtaken with weeds such as false Dandelion (also known as Catsear or Flatweed) and Capeweed. Toxins from these weeds affect the nervous system resulting in an exaggerated high stepping action in one or both hind legs. In mild [...]

# Natural Horse Health Care -



**Teeth Troubles and a Positive Outcome by Vanessa McDonald** -I have owned Missy now for five years. The sad truth is that during those five years I have not got her teeth done. It was not meant to be neglect! I thought I was doing her a favour, protecting her from the stress of a dentist visit. Missy was given to me as an [...]



- **Mud Fever/Greasy Heel Treatment Tips** Mud Fever or greasy heel affects the lower limbs of our equine friends and may cause pain and swelling that is accompanied with crusty scabs of varying sizes. In serious cases the horse may become lame and the whole leg seriously swollen and infected. WHAT CAUSES IT? Mud fever was thought to [...]

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With so many alternative therapies to choose from, it is important to know how they work so you can select the best option and therapist for your horse.

Remember these therapies are not intended to replace veterinary diagnosis or treatment.

It is very important to get a correct diagnosis from a veterinarian (and possibly a second or third opinion) before you enlist the assistance of an alternative therapist or apply a treatment yourself.

Always check with your veterinarian that it's appropriate to use additional therapies for the condition (and stage of treatment) you are treating as some things cannot be used when the horse is on certain drugs.

# Alternative Therapies -

Most qualified alternative therapists will also be able to advise when you can use their treatment in conjunction with traditional therapy and/or surgeries.



*Accupressure is an alternative therapy you can learn to do yourself, and is useful to assist many types of injuries.*

**More Alternative & Natural Therapy articles to read online - click on the title to access them.**

**Scientific Consciousness Interface Operations System (SCIO)-** The 21st Century has brought with it an environment that is highly polluted and a western lifestyle that is highly complicated. Our bodies are becoming less able to deal with the stress of living under such pressures, and often reacts with vague conditions such as poor immune systems, depression, emotional imbalances, insomnia, behavioural issues, aches/pains, [...]

**Natural Treatments – Reiki** -Reiki is an ancient 'hands on' healing energy that promotes a natural healing in all living things. It is medically proven and can reduce anxiety and restore the animal's natural balance physically, emotionally and mentally. Recently I met Dianne from Animal Magic, who is a level 2 Reiki practitioner with seven years of experience, practicing [...]

**Photonic Light Therapy – How does it work?**-The session will start with a machine called a BioFind. The BioFind is a innovative, one-of-a-kind tool for scanning the horse's entire body. Whenever living tissue is damaged or injured there is a change in the electrical resistance in the tissue relative to the immediate area. The BioFind locates these areas by reading the variances [...]

# Alternative Therapies -



**Honey for healing wounds**-More than 4,000 years after Egyptians began applying honey to wounds, it is now being sold for regular wound care all over the world. Called Medihoney, it is made from a highly absorbent seaweed-based material, saturated with manuka honey, a particularly potent type that experts say kills germs and speeds healing. Also called Leptospermum honey, [...]

- **Herbal Medicine For Horses** by Les Rees Les Rees is a qualified practitioner of Natural Medicine for Horses and has opened a practice here in Tasmania. She is particularly interested in stress related disease in horses and wrote her final assessment thesis on the subject. Stress can cause a lot of physiological symptoms which, if left untreated can perpetuate [...]



**Flower Essences for People and Pets**-Flower essences (remedies) are natural remedies that address negative emotions, sometimes physical ailments, and help to bring about a more positive mind-set. The healing properties of flower essences are made possible through the life force, vibration of the flowers used. The life force of different flowers are "in tune" with different emotions with flower essences [...]



**Equine Tension Release Therapy ( ETRT )**-by Nola Cooke ETRT is a treatment which aims to secure long-lasting relief from mobilisation difficulties in horses. Such difficulties can present in many different ways from purely musculo-skeletal to the purely behavioural. However the problem presents, it is usually pain based, and, in most if not all cases, it is human induced; albeit, often [...]

# Alternative Therapies -



**Cranio Sacral Therapy**-There are so many types of alternative therapies available to help heal our horses. Each month I will feature one in detail to help readers make an appropriate choice when looking for therapies to support traditional veterinary medicine. Always seek a veterinary opinion if your horse appears ill in any way. What is CranioSacral Work? [...]

- **Bowen Therapy**What is the Bowen Technique? The Bowen technique is a gentle remedial therapy which stimulates the body to rebalance itself and promotes healing, pain relief and recovery of energy. How did it get its name? Tom Bowen was born in 1916 in Brunswick, Australia. He treated the aches and pains of the people with whom [...]



**Applied Zoopharmacognosy**-Applied Zoopharmacognosy and Horses The first thing most people ask is how to pronounce Zoopharmacognosy quickly followed by what does it mean. The word is a composite of the ancient Greek words for animal (zoo), medicine (pharma) and knowing (cognosy). The term refers to the process by which animals self medicate in the wild. It [...]



**Accupressure**-Focus For Training: An Acupressure Approach By Amy Snow & Nancy Zidonis, Authors of Equine Acupressure: A Working Manual We are all so busy these days, even our horses are busy. They sense our state of mind and feel our stress level sometimes making it difficult to attain the right level of synchronicity for a [...]

# Worming



*Teaching your horse to accept the worming tube is easy with positive reinforcement (clicker training) and regular practice.*

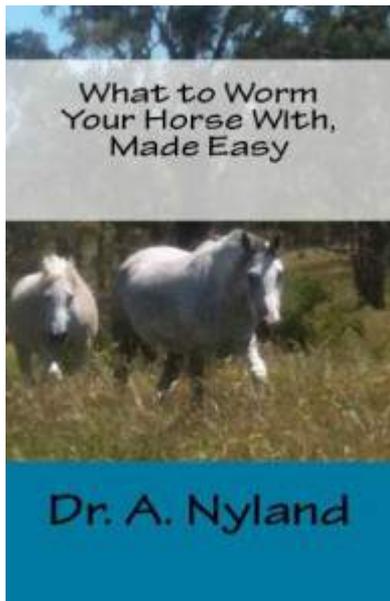
Worming is one of those horse care tasks we'd all rather avoid, but for your horse's health (and even to save their life) you need to carry out a regular de-worming program, knowing what wormer to use and when.

Most of us trying to keep our horses as naturally as possible, would rather not use chemical wormers, but if you avoid them altogether, you are risking your horse's life.

Chemical worm resistance can be reduced by the use of faecal egg counts, and a worming program that targets the 20% of the horses that generally carry 80% of the worms.

If we take a holistic approach by ensuring we use good pasture management (removing manure is one of the best ways to reduce worm infestations) and regular faecal egg counts, we can reduce the amount of chemical wormers used.

# Worming -



However, to exclude all chemical wormers puts your horse at risk of colic and/or peritonitis due to the small strongyle being the problem worm of today. The following articles will explain why, and to get the latest information and methods for worming read Ann Nylands book '[What to Worm Your Horse with Made Easy](#)'.

I would love to be able to worm my horses more naturally, and years ago I tried it that way, but their health was suffering due to the following issues:

- Property too small for the number of horses (15 on less than 40 acres).
- Not enough help/time to pick up poo regularly and land too steep for manure vacuum cleaners!
- Not enough paddocks to rotate around to let them rest for long enough.
- Neighbours who don't worm their horses for bots and so my horses get infected too.
- A wet climate which allows worms to spread easily (they travel in water and along grass that is covered in water droplets).
- Breeding young horses who are more susceptible to worm infestation so they need treatment more regularly until around 3 yrs.
- Natural wormers don't really work as my faecal egg counts showed.
- Previous problems with colic symptoms in various horses which I couldn't attribute to anything else, and which resolved upon worming.

# Worming -

Since reading [Ann Nylands book](#) –

Horse Care: What you don't know about Worms will surprise you!', I've come to realise that perhaps the only way you can get around using less chemical wormers is to have the opposite of all the situations I listed above, and/or use a long acting wormer like Equest which suggests 14-16 weeks between treatments.

Also, some horses are more likely to have a better immunity to worms so if you only had a couple of horses who lived together on a largish acreage then you might get away with worming naturally, picking up all manure and keeping a check on their egg counts.

However, egg counts won't tell you if they have tapeworms or encysted strongyles that can stay in the gut wall for years, just waiting for the right conditions to hatch.

Encysted strongyles are one of the leading causes of worm related deaths (most present with colic symptoms or severe and prolonged diarrhea, and sadly, many people aren't aware of this.

In a recent poll on worming, from a total of 280 votes – it looks like less than half the voters knew what to treat encysted strongyles with (Moxidectin or Fenbendazole).

Results of the Poll by The Horse.com

Which of the following de-wormers do you use to treat encysted small strongyles?

- Ivermectin: 35.57% (164)
- Moxidectin (e.g., Quest): 25.60% (118)
- Pyrantel Pamoate (e.g., Strongid): 19.09% (88)
- Fenbendazole (e.g., Panacur): 15.84% (73)
- Other: 3.90% (18)

# Why I Use Chemical Wormers -

Ivermectin will not touch encysted strongyles and there seems to be more brands of wormer these days that contain Ivermectin (+ other chemicals) than there are alternatives.

To better understand worming and for a complete list of wormer brands with their chemical compounds, read Dr Ann Nylands book

**Horse Care: What you don't know about Worms will surprise you!** - [you can get it here.](#)

Another good reason to use a chemical worming program is to treat a worm many of us don't even realise our horses harbour .... until they start itching and scratching constantly.

[This article also from the Horse's Back](#) explains why neck threadworms are often mistaken for other types of itch, and what to do about treating them.



# Why I Use Chemical Wormers -

## **What do these conditions have in common?**

Colic and Peritonitis are both serious issues that require immediate veterinary treatment, and both can be caused by worms!

This is something I discovered when my 6yo Arabian stallion Finn, suffered a colic episode that also resulted in hypothermia as he went down on a cold wet day.



Thankfully, I went to his paddock again at lunchtime (the boys had been fed at around 9am and he seemed fine) to get the trailer for re-filling with hay, and found him laying

down in the rain. When I got closer, I saw he was in a lot of pain so immediately gave him some rescue remedy (always carry some in the car) then raced back home for a warm rug and the stethoscope.

I took his heart rate which was up to 48bpm and allowed him to lay down as he was quiet and not wanting to roll. His 3 paddock mates all stood around us looking concerned, with the most senior gelding occasionally trying to chew on Finn to get him up.

When there was no noticeable difference in his pain levels, gut sounds or heart rate after 30 mins I called the vet who arrived within half an hour.

After checking all his vital signs he administered some painkillers and muscle relaxant then did a rectal exam which confirmed an impaction, so Finn was then stomach tubed with Parrafin oil and Tympanel to help the impaction pass.

I was very proud that he handled his first rectal exam and stomach tube without even a twitch!

# Colic, Peritonitis and Worms -

Finn then seemed much better (the drugs were working) so I walked him home on the vet's advice as movement would help the impaction shift, and with his mates following, he strode home and happily tucked into some hay in the barn with access to the yard overnight.

The next morning he was quite depressed again and not eating and after I'd fed the others, he was laying down again obviously in pain. Another visit from the vet confirmed a high temperature indicating an infection so he was treated aggressively with antibiotics for peritonitis.

He seemed to improve the next day so was moved to fresh pasture, but by the following day he was down again. This time the vet suggested worming him again (he'd been wormed 10 days prior with Panacur) this time with Equest Plus for tapeworm as they have been known to cause an impaction colic.

So we did that immediately and gave more painkillers to keep him comfortable.



*So many small strongyles in one ball of manure!*

The next morning he was fine and his manure was already passing a large amount of tiny hair like worms which I believe were small strongyles.

The Panacur would have been enough to kill the existing worm burden, but as I hadn't done it for 5 days in a row, the emerging encysted strongyles caused the peritonitis and subsequent colic symptoms.

After passing that burden, he made a complete recovery thankfully – many horses get seriously ill or die if not treated correctly.

# Colic, Peritonitis and Worms -

Finn may be one of the 20% of horses that carry 80% of the worms so it's possible he had a large number of encysted strongyles that upon worming with a single dose of Panacur, emerged to take the place of the cleaned out worm population. This mass emergence would have caused both peritonitis and the impaction colic.

My intention had been to worm him with Panacur for 5 days in a row to kill any encysted strongyles, but I couldn't get the horses to take it in their feed and dosing four strong and protesting boys with the drench gun every day for 5 days (with limited success on my own – liquid wormers are very easy to spit out), I gave up and decided to just use Equest next time they were due.

And that was my mistake as it had been exactly 12 months since they were wormed with Equest so they were overdue. I've since realised I should have been worming twice yearly with Equest for encysted strongyles ([Dr Ann Nylands Free E-book – What to Worm Your Horse With Made Easy](#) ) gives good schedules to follow.

**So what are encysted strongyles?** They are a 3rd stage larvae of the small strongyle (cyathostomes) that are eaten and go into the lining of the horse's colon and form a cyst.

This is why they are called encysted strongyles and the only chemicals that will kill them are moxidectin with a 90% success rate (in Equest/Quest wormer), and Fenbendazole in Panacur 100 if it's used for 5 consecutive days at 10ml per 100kg. No other wormer will be able to kill them.

Encysted strongyles can stay in a horse for years (or as little as 8 weeks) before they develop into 4th stage larvae and enter the colon.

# Colic, Peritonitis and Worms -



*Finn feeling better.*

If there's a huge amount of them, the emerging may kill a horse and I suspect many 'mystery' deaths could be attributed to them. If there are less but a lot emerging, the horse may get colic, and/or scour and/or get edema. So it's vital to worm your horse at least twice yearly with Equest/Quest or Panacur (if you can get them to take it effectively) to ensure that the emerging encysted strongyles won't harm your horse.

Also useful to know is that worm counts will not show how infested a horse is with encysted strongyles!

There is a lot more in depth info on this in [Ann Nylands book](#) which I highly recommend to every horse owner.

To sum it up I quote from the book "Research has shown that cyathostomes (small strongyles) have become more and more important as a cause of sickness and death in horses, and today are considered the main reason for worming horses".

If you want to save yourself a huge vet bill, and your horse from all those injections – don't put it off! Equest is available (often at discount prices) in many online stores and is sold by most saddlery stores, rural feed stores and vets.

# Colic, Peritonitis and Worms -

For more good information about encysted strongyles, read ['The Worm That Kills – And Why Only Two Worming Chemicals Can Stop It'](#).

## Teaching your Horse to Accept Worming Easily

This is something I've found works brilliantly with clicker training. One of my favourite teachers of this method is Sandy Poppema of Hippologic.com

Sandy has [2 videos here](#) that will show you how to achieve 'stress free' worming and teach your horse to accept other oral medications.



# Herd Psychology



Herd Psychology is the understanding of how a horse herd works so we can care for our horse's emotional health better.

If our horse is mentally and emotionally healthy, then this makes our interactions so much more pleasant for both us and our equine.

Did you know a herd is actually all the groups of horses you have on a property? A band or harem refers to the smaller group of horses that live together. A band can be a group of geldings, mares, or stallions, or a mixture of both. All male bands are referred to as 'Batchelors' and a harem is usually made up of a male, and several females.

Even though a herd may have several groups that live in separate areas, they will still interact even if it is only by sight and sound. This is why it's important to consider what is happening (or may happen) when you re-arrange a band/harem, or remove a member for riding etc.

# Herd Psychology -

When a horse is mentally and emotionally attached to a herd, it does make it harder to remove them without fuss. However with gradual, careful and positive training you can have your horse enjoy outings and interactions with others. The following articles will help with some ideas and solutions to problems commonly encountered.

## Herd Psychology Articles



**How to help your herd bound horse**-by Cynthia Cooper Often referred to as being 'barnsour' or rushing home, the herd bound horse just wants to stay near the barn or get home and back to their mates as fast as possible. It can turn in to a frustrating if not dangerous situation, especially if you're out on the trail and [...]

**Separation Anxiety**-I have a problem that I would like your advice on – you may remember that I talked to you a couple of months ago about the two horses that I have and them not wanting to be separated? Well this situation has become much worse since I haven't been able to work with them [...]

**Refusing To Go Forwards**-Liz asked: Why is my horse refusing to go forwards when she gets tired of being out on a trail ride on her own? She even starts backing up which can be quite dangerous and she normally doesn't do this. What can I do to stop her doing this? Firstly, if we look at this [...]

# Herd Interaction

Have you ever seen a horse flatten its ears at the approach of other horses, constantly threatening to kick or acting scared when it gets close to another horse?

Often people think the horse is being aggressive and anti-social, which it is, but that's not always because it's a dominant horse.



Many horses display this behaviour because they are fearful of the proximity of other horses, and our usual reaction is to punish them for it.

Instead, we should be reassuring, acting as the 'alpha' for our horse and trying to solve the problem at its roots.

That way, we can help the horse to become calm and confident, particularly amongst other horses, which is where we would like to be seen with our 'partner' displaying good manners.

# Herd Interaction - It's Vital for your horse's mental health -

Unfortunately, many horses are kept in a far from ideal environment, and far from a natural one.

To start with, we tend to keep them in small areas, sometimes confined to stables and yards, rather than in the wide open spaces and herd situation that nature provides for them.

When a horse is isolated from his own species, he can become perverse in his behaviour when re-united with them.

For instance, young colts are almost always separated from the herd as they come up to yearling age when their behaviour gets precocious. They then get a distorted opinion of themselves, especially when they can push people around too.

This results in injury when they are put back in a herd situation as they push the boundaries and get put back in their place.

If people separate horses "in case they injure each other", they are more or less sentencing that horse to solitary confinement for the rest of their lives until their show/performance career is over.

Young horses especially need herd interaction to develop a comfortable relationship with other horses. Without that, they can be very fearful of the approach of another horse, which they show by threatening to bite or kick in order to clear their personal space.

This can be a real problem when you ride amongst others and is a danger to others that is your responsibility.

# Herd Interaction - It's Vital for your horse's mental health -

Sometimes its not enough to run a young horse with only its mother for company and discipline. Most mares are too easy on their offspring which is why some breeders have an old retired horse to be the 'nanny' for a group of youngsters. That way they have the best of both worlds – discipline and others to play with.

So, if you're feeling guilty and want to do something about providing your horses with herd interaction, don't just let them loose together unless its in a huge area (50+ acres) with no places a horse can corner another.

If you only have small areas, get the horses to respect electric fencing then divide the pasture in half or fence off a smaller section to place the new horse into until it's being accepted by the others over the fence.

Then, watch which horse seems to enjoy being nearest to the new one and put them together for a while before introducing them both back into the herd.

Of course, ensure that all areas that could trap a horse are fenced off and even round off corners as two horses may trap a less alpha animal.

To help your horse gain confidence when you are amongst others, play the seven games in an active way to keep their focus on you. By using some approach and retreat, you can get your horse to accept others in his/her personal zone.

When you're riding be aware of your horse's comfort zone and be prepared to move your horse in such a way that you are in control when another horse comes in your direction. Sideways and backwards or using an indirect rein to cause your horse to face another, is safer than turning tail.

# Herd Interaction - It's Vital for your horse's mental health -

Ask your friends to help you by setting up situations where you use approach and retreat and lots of friendly game with each other's horses. This may take time and many repetitions but it's worth the effort to have a brave and sociable partner.

If you're not sure that your horse is being fearful or just aggressive, seek the assistance of your instructor who can also help you plan the rehabilitation process.

When introducing Horses to a herd it's best to first run your horse in a paddock or yard beside the herd and take notice of who he seems to like talking to or who hangs out with him.

This horse would then be the best to put in the paddock with him as a buddy for a week or, until they have formed a bond, and then introduce both horses into the herd in a large, safe paddock which means no tight areas where anyone can get cornered and where there's good safe fencing and nothing they can hurt themselves on if they all go for a gallop.

Your horse will be better accepted with his buddy who was previously a herd member but be prepared for some hierarchy battles anyway. It's safest if all the horses are un-shod so injury from kicks are minimised.

If this isn't possible, then dividing the paddock with electric tape and making the herd smaller by dividing in half (keep obvious friends together and it usually works better to have mares and geldings separate) minimises the risks of bullying.

# Herd Interaction - It's Vital for your horse's mental health -

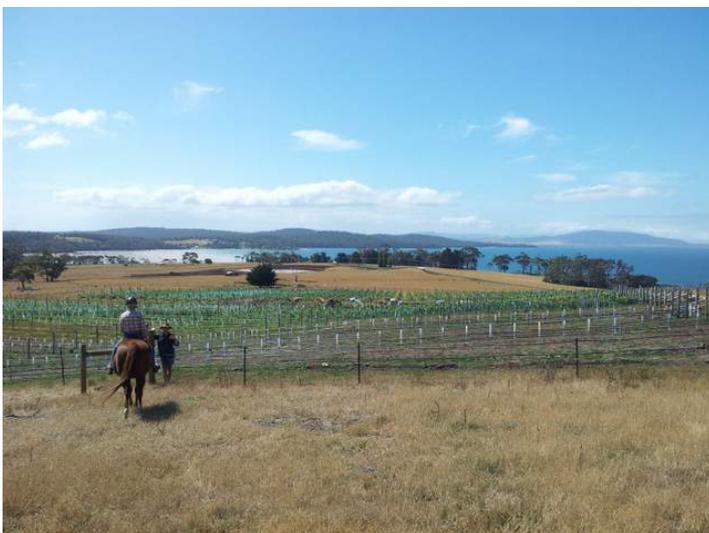
When you release your horse into the herd, do it while they are well away from you otherwise, you risk being caught in the middle of the first introductions.

Also, have another person or two on stand by in case there is a problem with a dominant horse being too aggressive towards the newcomer who may need to be rescued and removed until he is accepted over the fence a bit longer.

As for becoming herd bound – yes, your level of savvy definitely helps your horse have confidence in you and your decision to leave the herd.

Keep in mind that the herd will be a comfort zone and your horse will be happier staying close to that comfort zone and gradually being asked to go further away in approach and retreat steps rather than expecting him to just cope with leaving.

If you take your horse out from the herd to feed him, then you and the feeding area will become a comfort zone that your horse won't mind going to. Try not to be too demanding when you first start asking him to leave the herd, as he will then think that all you do is provide discomfort.



With small, gradual steps, you will be able to keep his affectionate, curious and playful attitude towards you by making it fun and comfortable for him to be with you in more demanding situations like going for a trail ride.

# Products to Help with Natural Horse Care

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