



Laminitis, early intervention crucial

by Andrew Bowe, B.App.Sc, Master Farrier

www.barehoofcare.com

Photos courtesy of The Mayfield Barehoof Rehabilitation Centre

Laminitis is never far off the radar. Most of northern Australia has now had rain and the south is primed for a big autumn break. It will be back. Laminitis is always a relevant subject for discussion.

At the Mayfield Barehoofcare Centre where we mostly deal with laminitis cases, we are just winding up our usual busy season with the last of this summer's patients approaching the end of their rehab. They are healed and getting ready to return home.

All up we have rehabbed a couple of dozen serious cases this season. Despite arriving in perilous situations, often with penetrating pedal bones, most will return to their original status of health and soundness (pre-laminitis), sometimes better than ever. A few will be paddock sound but will have limited athletic ability due to permanent bony damage. One patient didn't survive.

This may well be an exceptional success rate by industry standards, but further improvement is needed until all horses that suffer from laminitis can be fully healed (if that is indeed possible).

The chances of recovery

What can be done to further improve a horse's chances of recovery?

A big clue can be found in the fact that our busiest time at Mayfield is actually the middle of Summer, not the heady days of Spring as you would probably expect.

Why? Because the concept of barefoot rehabilitation is recent and somewhat unheralded, we have mostly been a place of last resort – when nothing else has worked. Horses that succumb to laminitis in the spring don't usually get sent to Mayfield until early summer; anything from two to six months (and sometimes longer) after their battle with laminitis first started; after other avenues of traditional treatment have been tried without success.

Having worked with so many serious laminitis cases over the last decade, we feel that we can legitimately draw some viable conclusions about factors that affect the likely outcome; whether it will be a 'happy ever after' or a sad ending. And it would seem the main variable dictating success or otherwise is the length of time that the laminitis has been ongoing before commencing barefoot rehab.

The sooner we get to work on their hooves, the more likely they will have a full recovery. Conversely, the longer after the laminitic episode has begun that we get to start, the less likely is a full recovery.

To successfully treat a horse with serious laminitis, think days, not weeks.

The barefoot rehab program is actually quite simple if it is tackled early and any complications are usually mild.

Treatment

Obviously the causative agent needs to be found and removed (this is why it is vital for veterinary involvement from the beginning of all laminitic cases). Then for healing to proceed, all weight needs to be taken from the laminar bond. If shoes are on, they should be removed immediately. The hoof wall then needs to be fully removed from ground contact, leaving just the frog and heel platforms weight bearing. Comfort should be provided by putting on hoof boots with soft pads.



Photo A

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Recovery

For recovery to continue unimpeded, the hoof walls need to be kept non-weightbearing with very regular trimming with the rasp held at 45° to the ground surface.

Then comes the hardest part of the rehab equation – remaining patient while the new hoof grows into place. It doesn't happen overnight.

(See photos A and B)

Laminitic horses treated this way usually follow a fairly predictable recovery timeline. It takes about four months for the newly attached hoof wall to reach ground level at the heels which coincides with a return to relative soundness. (See Photo C)

Compare this to similar cases that have been left too long before commencing treatment. The freshly emerging hoof wall still has laminitic rings and is still divergent at the heels, a sure indication the cycle of laminitis has not been broken. When acute cases become chronic, that is a whole new set of problems (and a story for another day).

(See Photos D and E)

Such hooves are also more likely to have complications such as an ingrown hoof wall or remodelling and lysis (bone loss) of the pedal bone or residual damage in the laminar bond.

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Photo B



Photo C



Photo D

The above-mentioned parameters of barefoot rehabilitation are fundamentally different to traditional treatment regimes. When a new paradigm such as this one is being proposed, it is best to back up statements with real life situations, such as the case study on the next page, which shows clearly how early intervention can produce a successful outcome even in the most serious of cases.

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Photo E

The pony that did not die



Healing laminitis with barefoot rehab.



The story so far...

First Edition 2013

by Andrew & Nicky Bowe

220 pages - Ph 03 5773 4306 order online
www.barehoofcare.com (preview chapter 1)
\$80 per copy plus p&h

Euthanasia due to Laminitis is a big killer of domestic horses.

This new book will change the way you think about laminitis. Laminitic horses can be healed.

There is a fundamental shift in the way laminitic hooves are managed which can possibly rectify even the most serious cases.

A comprehensive, step by step action plan to combat laminitic episodes is included and this is supported by actual case studies that show how to solve a broad range of different laminitic scenarios.

The book has been written by Andrew and Nicky Bowe, who have been at the forefront of developing barefoot rehab for laminitis. For over a decade they have been healing serious laminitis cases.

Packed with easy to read information and over 400 colour photos, this ground breaking text is not just for owners of laminitic horses, but it is a vital read for all horse owners; a reference to be kept within reach.

You can learn how to prevent laminitis but also what to do if your horse succumbs to this insidious disease.

Laminitis Case Study

Background

This eventer aged (see photo F) in his early teens had been down with a major episode of acute laminitis (caused by Spring grass) for only three weeks prior to coming to Mayfield. We managed to start his rehabilitation very early in the laminitic process.

He'd previously had bouts of seasonal laminitis, so was obviously prone to the pathology, but on this occasion the situation had been made far worse by him undergoing a sudden change from full eventing work to paddock rest due to a forequarter muscle injury.

After the initial diagnosis, he had been shod with 'bushranger' shoes and was heavily medicated with bute. Far from responding to the treatment, he was rapidly getting worse and was in a significant amount of pain, lying down for lengthy periods and visibly distressed when standing. He was not eating.

Radiographs had not been taken at this point, but euthanasia was being considered as a distinct possibility.

See photos G and H



Photo G

Rehabilitation

When this horse arrived at Mayfield, the front shoes were removed straight away and the hooves put into boots with soft rehab pads with extra frog support.

Unfortunately, the patient was too sore to either trim the front hooves or remove the hinds. Instead, the trimming job was finished a couple of days later when the patient was sedated by the vet who also x-rayed all four hooves.

The radiographs (see next page) showed massive rotation in all four hooves, with the distal tip of all the pedal bones pointing precariously towards the ground.

Externally, the hooves themselves were also quite indicative of the rotating pedal bones within, with bulging soles that were very sensitive to even light thumb pressure. Penetration was imminent.

Despite this, the decision to proceed with rehabilitation was made collectively by the team: owner, vet and farrier. We thought that the balance for recovery was still in his favour. It was early after the laminitic onset and his pedal bones – although in a dire position relative to the hoof capsule – were still pristine. At Mayfield we have healed cases far worse than this.

As a precaution, the vet also conducted blood tests to rule out any unknown complications such as infection or organ damage (we routinely get 'bloods' taken on serious cases that come to Mayfield for this reason).

Bute was discontinued (the initial prescription had expired) and herbal pain relief (Devil's Claw and White Willow) was started.

His feed was changed to eliminate non-structural carbohydrates.



Photo H

The diet was mainly soaked grass hay, backed up by a hard feed of soy hull pellets and soaked oaten chaff with relevant vitamins and minerals. Simple and bland.

The patient improved rapidly. All of the solar wounds healed over and he was trotting happily in boots when he left Mayfield after 2 ½ months, even though he was still a work in progress requiring further nursing from his owners.

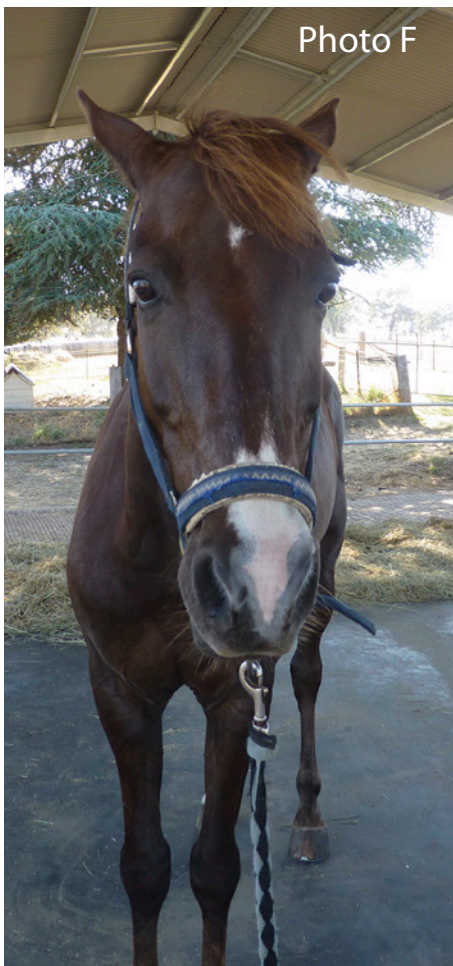
See photo M

Back at his home farm, a loop system was set up to encourage movement, whilst restricting pasture intake and his new low sugar diet was continued. His hoofcare was taken over by a local veterinarian who had also trained as an equine podiotherapist.

His hooves have continued to improve.

This case demonstrates the absolute importance of rapid intervention with barefoot rehab when a horse develops serious laminitis.

Photo F



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This horse avoided almost certain euthanasia by the timely change of weightbearing management; shoes off and the whole wall removed from weightbearing. Plus of course padded hoof boots for comfort.

It also highlights the need for veterinary involvement from the outset, including good quality radiographs which should be routine with all clinical laminitis cases.

But it also shows that serious laminitis does not necessarily have to end with euthanasia. It can be turned around.

Instead of subjecting a laminitic patient to various ideas of traditional treatment, most of which have low success rates maybe the time has come for barefoot rehabilitation to be considered as the first choice. This success story is but one of many.

Where is this horse now?

He has been back under saddle for some time, is sound and will likely be going back to eventing competition.

See photo N

To quote his owner – “He’s a different pony since his time with you....his feet are looking great and he has been 100% sound for 12 months, which is fantastic for a pony who had previously spent his life struggling with frequent episodes of laminitis. Last year he had a particularly severe episode and we were faced with the difficult decision as to whether we would euthanase him... he is a very lucky pony!”

