

Please Explain

There are many aspects of riding terms, horse conditions and management practices that are accepted in the equestrian community, without them being fully understood by everyone.

Here, we have asked experienced horse people to shed some light on common 'horse lore'.



Original hoof (left) and 3 mths later.



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Hoof Cancer

Equine Canker

Canker, which has been called hoof cancer in horses, is an infectious process that causes a chronic enlargement or increase of the horn-producing tissues of the equine hoof.

This overgrowth of tissue degenerates and then becomes contaminated with a wide variety of germs. There is always a very offensive odour present, that is unmistakable.

The disease generally originates in the frog, and can often be mistaken for thrush in its early stages.

Simply, it could be described as a degenerative dermatitis. The abnormal growth is soft and spongy. Left untreated it underruns the entire sole and can even travel up underneath the walls.

The exact cause of canker is unknown. Horses with systemic or constitutional upset are more susceptible. Research by Dr Doug Butler notes the cause to be 'constant contact to strong ammonia compounds (urine and faeces) which irritate the sensitive structures and cause benign and possibly malignant growths to be produced.'

For legal and veterinary terms, a horse with canker is unsound. Due to the difficulty and length of time taken to treat the disease it is generally considered incurable.

If discovered before the foot has suffered extensive damage the prognosis is favourable, provided the sensitive structures of the hoof has not been damaged.

Historically more prevalent in untreated cases of thrush, greasy heel or a puncture wound, canker was more likely to occur in horses with immune problems such as poddy-reared horses and horses that have suffered a bad virus or are kept in dirty, unventilated stables.

TREATMENT

Canker is a disease that has defied the attempts of veterinarians to provide a specific remedy and effective cure. Daily treatment is necessary for success.

Mayfield Barefoot Rehabilitation Clinic in Yarck, Victoria, recorded the successful treatment of this rare disease.

Step 1. The hooves were trimmed, soaked in warm saline solution for 30 minutes, while changing water three times during the process. The affected feet were kept

dry and clean and as sterile as possible. Stalls must be kept dry and free from soiled matter. Lime the floor works well.

Movement and exercise also play a role in healthy regeneration of tissue.

At Mayfield, in fine weather the horse lived in a rubber laneway that was cleaned twice daily; and in a firm-floored stable, dusted with lime, during wet weather. Later on in the treatment, the affected feet were bandaged and or booted and the horse allowed out to pasture. Bandages or boots were not left on 24/7.

Step 2. Treated daily with a strong anti-bacterial/ anti fungal/ antiviral solution. Virkon powder or tablets, neat, was used with great success. A cheaper option is Phenyl (garbage bin sanitiser).

Step 3. The diseased material and cankerous growth is often similar in histology to proud flesh and bleeds profusely. Surgical removal is the current veterinary recommendation; however documentation shows that this is often not successful. It seems that such disturbance of the tissues can cause the regrowth to be even more rapid. It is also very hard to slow the profuse bleeding, and difficult to fully resect into the corium to differentiate and remove the offending cells from normal cells. Potassium permanganate was used neat to burn and stop bleeding. Gradual resection, combined with chemical burning (salicylic acid - neat - or wart killer) works well.

In a dry environment, twice-daily application of equal parts yellow lotion, copper sulphate and DMSO can be applied using a toothbrush, then generously dusted with lime.

Step 4. Optimum body health is important to immunity and healing; a good diet, lots of movement and a positive state of mind are all-important. To promote healthy new growth of tissue a combination of ti-tree oils, Manuka honey and calendula were used.

Hardening and drying agents may be used to help harden up the hoof tissue, however the infection must be treated first - we do not want to lock in any anaerobes so they can thrive again!

Prevention is far better than cure – regular stall and hoof cleaning is important in all stabled horses.

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THE
BAREFOOT
BLACKSMITH

After completing a Bachelor of Applied Science in 1991 Nicky went on to qualify as a Veterinary nurse, working for 10 years full time in the veterinary industry. In 2002 with her husband Andrew they opened Mayfield Bare Hoof Care Rehabilitation Centre and in 2004 the Barefoot Blacksmith Maintenance trimming workshops.

They are also directors and lecturers of the Australian College of Equine Podiotherapy offering a Diploma in Equine Podiotherapy.

www.barehoofcare.com