



Wound management for your horse

WHAT IS A WOUND?



A wound is a break in the continuity of the skin. Wounds can range from shallow, partial thickness wounds that involve only the superficial layers, to full thickness wounds that reveal deeper tissues, perhaps muscle, tendon, ligament or bone.

The wound location and the tissues involved are more critical than the overall appearance of the wound. Your veterinary surgeon will usually need to see the wound to advise on the best course of treatment and possible complications.



Even tiny wounds close to a joint on the limb can be very serious. Despite their size your vet may take these small wounds very seriously and may undertake further investigation.

It is essential that your horse is properly vaccinated against tetanus.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR VET



Your vet should be consulted about every wound. This is especially important if:

- ▲ Wounds are bleeding heavily
- ▲ Clear discharge is leaking from a wound close to a joint or tendon, even for very small wounds
- ▲ Offensive discharge from the wound, coupled with heat and swelling
- ▲ Onset of lameness in a limb that has a wound
- ▲ Deterioration in the appearance or an increase in size of the wound

▲ Tissue within the wound becomes 'proud' i.e. it stands out from the wound (shown above)

These wounds are at high risk of complication or may only be resolved with surgery.

WOUND TYPES

In order for your vet to give the best advice on the treatment of a wound it is important to be able to describe the wound accurately, its nature, extent and location can make a difference to the treatment procedure.

Wound type	Possible cause	Appearance
Incisions and lacerations	e.g. barbed wire, glass	These can bleed heavily and may involve deeper structures.
Abrasions	e.g. friction across a hard surface	Wounds will likely contain debris such as grit, sand or dirt. Thorough cleansing is essential to remove foreign body material.
Penetrating or puncture wounds	e.g. penetration from a nail or thorn	May be a very small wound but they should never be underestimated. These wounds can involve underlying structures and are also liable to support tetanus and other bacteria. Particularly serious when close to a joint or tendon.
Contusions	e.g. bruising from kicks from other horses	There is more damage within and below the skin and the surface may not be broken.

CONTROL OF BLEEDING



Wounds that are bleeding heavily involve important blood vessels and wounds that bleed in a pulsatile manner involve arterial damage. Both of these wounds need **immediate** veterinary attention.

Bleeding can be controlled temporarily by the application of a

pressure bandage. A sterile absorbent dressing is applied directly to the wound with a pad of absorbent cotton dressing and this is bandaged firmly in place.

Your vet should be called immediately.



HEALING DELAY

There are many reasons that wound healing can be prolonged or may fail. The specific factors that might delay healing in a particular wound will be addressed by your vet in a way that is practical for you and your horse and you should be able to discuss any concerns openly.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP MANAGE YOUR HORSE'S WOUND AT HOME



Wound cleansing

Wounds cleansed within 4-6 hours of wounding are at a lower risk of complication and infection.

Once bleeding has stopped the wound should be cleansed using plenty of clean water or warm saline made up with 2 teaspoons of salt to 1 litre of cooled boiled water. Flushing the wound thoroughly with a hosepipe is acceptable as an initial flushing. Chemicals, ointments and pastes should not be applied without veterinary guidance.

Dressing changes

Applying a bandage is a skilled process and your vet will advise you on how to apply a dressing and bandage properly.

The dressing your vet advises is likely to be matched to the type of wound your horse has.

Always discuss alternative dressings with your vet first.

Minimise movement at the site of the wound

Movement at the wound site can slow the process of healing and so special bandages may be required that limit movement.

Box rest may also be required.

Seek veterinary advice

If you have any concern about a wound always consult your vet. Advice over the phone may be all that is required.



WHAT IF MY VET RECOMMENDS SURGERY?



Many wounds can be closed easily using sutures or staples and it may be possible for your vet to do this at home. Sometimes closing a wound early can be detrimental rather than helpful so do not be surprised if your vet does not do this. Your vet may need to insert a drain into the wound to help release fluid during healing. The horse may require an anaesthetic or have to be admitted to hospital for specialist care.

'Proud flesh' is a well recognised complication of wound healing in horses, especially for leg wounds. The management of this often requires surgical intervention and may involve skin grafting to achieve the best results. Grafts or reconstruction would usually be performed in a hospital situation. These techniques are used to reduce healing time and improve the cosmetic appearance.

PERSONAL SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT

Only attempt to change dressings and cleanse wounds if it is safe to do so. Frightened or lively horses may need to be sedated to achieve thorough cleansing and a dressing change.