# Equine Feet: Thrush and Canker

**“No foot, no horse”.**

Two conditions that can affect the hooves of horses or donkeys are thrush and canker. Thrush is a very common condition of the horse’s foot that we start seeing more as the weather changes. Canker is far less common but an important condition to treat early.

## Thrush

Thrush is a condition affecting the frog of the hoof, often associated with dark, moist areas and bacterial infection. It is commonly found in horses kept in wet, muddy or dirty conditions, although it can occur in well-managed environments too. Some foot conformations are more prone to it. It is also more likely to occur in horses on box rest or those doing very little exercise.

## Signs to look out for:

- A black or dark discharge around the frog.
- An unpleasant smell from the hoof.
- Soft, crumbly or deteriorating frog tissue.
- Sensitivity when the affected area is cleaned or examined.
- Lameness in more advanced or painful cases.



## How you can help prevent thrush:

- Regularly pick out your horse’s feet and check the frog, grooves and sole for changes. Particularly if your horse is on box rest.
- Keep stable bedding as clean and dry as possible
- Ensure adequate bedding so horse’s aren’t standing on wet stable mats
- Manage muddy gateways where practical (mud mats or similar may help)
- Regular farriery to help maintain good hoof balance and healthy frog tissue.

If you notice signs of thrush, seek advice from your vet, particularly if your horse is lame, the area is painful or the problem persists. Treatment may involve careful cleaning, appropriate topical products and addressing contributing hoof or management issues. Avoid cutting away healthy frog tissue yourself. Your farrier or hoof trimmer may be able to assist you.

Summerleaze equine vets

## Canker

Canker is a chronic condition involving abnormal growth and deterioration of the tissues of the foot, often affecting the frog and sometimes extending to other parts of the hoof. It is thought to involve a complex interaction of microorganisms and abnormal tissue responses.

Unlike straightforward thrush, canker can be persistent and may progress despite routine hoof cleaning.

## Signs to look out for:



- White, grey or pink, irregular tissue around the frog or sole.
- Tissue that looks soft, frond-like or cauliflower-like.
- Persistent moisture, discharge or a characteristic unpleasant smell.
- Tissue that bleeds easily when touched.
- A hoof problem that does not improve with routine care or repeatedly returns.

Canker may initially be mistaken for thrush or other hoof conditions. Early veterinary assessment is important because successful treatment can be challenging and may require a combination of veterinary treatment, careful removal of affected tissue where appropriate, topical therapy, protective dressings and ongoing hoof care. The treatment of Canker can end up being quite extensive surgery that needs repeating and the use of hospital plates under shoes for an extended period of time so it is vital to identify and treat it as quickly as possible.

If you suspect canker, contact your veterinary surgeon promptly. Do not attempt to cut out or aggressively treat abnormal tissue yourself.

## When should you call a vet:

Please contact the practice if your horse has a persistently foul-smelling hoof, unusual tissue growth, bleeding from the frog, increasing sensitivity, problem that is not improving or if your farrier/hoof trimmer has any concerns. Early intervention can help prevent small hoof problems from becoming more complicated. If your horse is significantly lame, has severe hoof pain or cannot comfortably bear weight, please ring us immediately.

**Contact us**: 01297 304007

**Email**: summerleaze@summerleaze-vets.co.uk

**Find us on Facebook and Instagram**

Summerleaze Equine  Summerleaze equine vets

**Directors:** Stuart Altoft, Antonia Milner, Alison Daubney

**Find us:** Summerleaze Farm, Gammonds Hill, Kilmington, Axminster, EX13 7RA