

Equine wound care



Does my horse need to see a vet?

Minor scrapes may not always require a visit; however, we recommend prompt veterinary attention for any wounds which are:

- Close to a joint
- Close to the eye
- Bleeding significantly
- Deep enough to see bone or tendon
- Associated with a foreign body such as a nail in the foot
- Covering a large area
- Associated with swelling or lameness



Or wounds which you are concerned about for any reason.

First aid for wounds:

Do:

- Bring the horse into a stable or clean shelter if possible (Do not try to move them if they are very lame!).
- Apply pressure with a clean towel or cloth if there is a lot of bleeding.
- Clean the wound with plain water if the horse will allow it.
- Small grazes which do not require vet visits can be cleaned with dilute hibiscrub or iodine (Do not use hibiscrub around the eyes as it causes irritation).

Do not:

- Remove any penetrating foreign body from the wound unless it is causing a hazard to you or the horse
- Apply any sprays or lotions to the wound- this can make it harder to assess. For example, Purple Spray



Veterinary treatment for wounds:

Typically, your vet will need to sedate your horse to clean and assess the wound, checking for damage to any underlying structures. Sutures may be used to close the wound if it is fresh (less than 6-12 hours old) and providing that the skin edges can be pulled together without too much tension. Wounds which are older, where skin is missing or in difficult locations may not be suitable for stitching. Deeper wounds may need to be partially left open or have drains inserted as significant fluid swelling can build up in any empty space left.

Veterinary treatment for wounds:

Wounds which lie close to joints or tendons are at risk of causing synovial sepsis, or infection within the joint space/tendon sheath. This is a serious condition which requires surgical treatment to flush the joint. It is not always obvious if a joint is involved or not, but if we suspect it is then we will recommend referral to hospital where x-rays, ultrasound and samples of joint fluid are used to confirm the diagnosis. Similarly, if something has penetrated the sole of the foot, imaging is needed to assess whether any of the joints or structures within are affected- it is easiest to do this with the object still in place, especially if it is metal as this shows up in an x-ray.

Wounds associated with lameness should always be assessed by a vet, even if the wound is small, as there is a chance that there could be damage to bones, joints or tendons, especially if the wound has been caused by trauma such as a kick.



Managing wounds:

After the initial treatment, it is often necessary to bandage wounds for a period of weeks. If sutures have been placed, these will usually be removed after around 14 days and the bandage can then be removed if there are no other issues, however for wounds which have been left open the process can be a bit longer.

Horses are prone to developing proud flesh, or excessive granulation tissue, especially on lower limb wounds where there isn't a lot of extra skin. The skin cannot grow over the proud flesh, so we typically treat by cutting away the excess tissue with a scalpel. There are no nerves in proud flesh so the horse cannot feel it being trimmed, but healthy tissue has a good blood supply so there is often some bleeding. Sometimes multiple repeated treatments are needed, as proud flesh has a tendency to grow back! A bandage is used to keep pressure on the wound as it heals, which helps to restrict the growth of granulation tissue.

Generally speaking, a bandage will need changing every 2-3 days, but this will vary depending on the wound and location; your vet will give advice for your case. A fact sheet about bandage care is available on our website for further information.

At any point if you feel your horse's wound is deteriorating or they develop any new swelling or lameness, please contact us for advice

Contact us: 01297 304007



Summerleaze_equine

Email: summerleaze@summerleaze-vets.co.uk



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