

Talking Ponies

A newsletter for pony clubs
& young riders 6-12 years

Issue 2 2010



From the editor...

As the warmer weather and longer daylight increases through spring and early summer, it's a great time to enjoy caring for and riding your pony. In the eastern states, good spring rainfall has resulted in plenty of pasture for ponies to graze. This can increase the risk of laminitis or founder in already well-conditioned and older ponies.

In this issue, we discuss the important topics of looking after your pony's hooves and legs. Healthy hooves and legs are, of course, important so that you can ride your pony and have fun.

We also look at which grasses are dangerous and likely to trigger founder if your pony eats too much when grazing 24/7 (all day and all night, every day of the week).

Lastly, we provide some hints on looking after your pony's lungs as well as keeping your pony cool during the hot weather, particularly how to cool your pony down after riding.

We hope that those of you who visited Equitana enjoyed the experience!

Best regards and enjoy your ponies,

Dr John Kohnke BVSc. RDA

Sealing Hoof Cracks

Under dry conditions, especially on sandy soil in a yard or paddock, your pony's hooves are likely to lose excess moisture through the soles and may develop 'sand cracks' as the hoof dries out. If you notice a sand crack, carefully clean it out with a brush or wash the sand out with a hose. Allow the hoof to dry for a couple of minutes and then swab the sand crack with a cotton wool ball soaked in methylated spirits to help clean and dry the crack. Ask a parent to help apply a Silastic window sealant to fill the crack and then smooth it over the hoof wall around the crack with an ice-cream stick. Stand your pony on a dry area for 10 minutes until the Silastic dries to seal the gap and prevent sand packing in to widen the crack. Replace the Silastic if it starts to fall out.

Handy Hint 2

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Simply email Gary at newsletters@kohnkesown.com

We will not send you product information or give your email address to any other person or company.

If you have other horses, you may also wish to subscribe to Talking Horses Equestrian - published every 6-8 weeks.

In this issue...

- * Hooves and Limbs – keeping your pony sound
- * Dangerous Grasses – sugars, sugars, sugars
- * Keeping Your Pony Cool – some helpful advice
- * Looking After Your Pony's Lungs

Plus handy hints and lots more!

Talking ponies is written to provide information for young riders and owners up to 12 years of age. It is designed to inform children so they can help keep their ponies healthy and sound. Talking horses Equestrian edition is suitable for older children and adults.

Dampen Hay Before Feeding

It is important to dampen dry hay before feeding it to your pony. A hungry pony is likely to take large mouthfuls of hay and have difficulty in chewing it and may choke if the hay becomes lodged in the back of the throat. Hay can be dampened by placing it in a hay net or a polywoven chaff bag and spraying it with clean water until it runs off the surface. Then let it soak up the moisture for 10 minutes so that it is soft, damp and ready to feed. Always place hay in a bin on the floor or ground to encourage the pony to pick up only a small amount at a time and to chew it carefully to prepare for digestion. Always hang a hay net below chest height to enable the pony to eat the hay slowly and to drain its nose and lower airways as it feeds.

Handy Hint 1

Did You Know that...

The horse walks on one toe (third metacarpal) or cannon bone below the knee (human wrist) and hock (human ankle) corresponding to the human middle finger. The other two 'fingers' on each side are the second and fourth metacarpals. These are shorter and taper to a short and fine end about 3/4 the way down the cannon bone. The splint bones join into the knee (and hock) joint at their upper end, just as the human index and ring fingers join into the wrist.

Check Your Pony's Teeth Every 6 Months Once it has Reached 20 Years of Age

If your aged pony has dental problems, it is recommended that a vet or specialist horse & pony dentist remove decayed or worn away teeth to prevent toxicity. Once a pony has had teeth removed, feed soft mashes, pelleted or extruded feeds that are easier to digest. Speak to a pony club instructor or your vet if you are worried about your older pony's teeth.

Handy Hint 3

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HOOVES AND LIMBS

Keeping Your Pony Sound

Care of the Soles and Frog

A healthy hoof wall provides protection to the internal structures of the hoof, the sole and frog. The hoof wall must be regularly cared for to help keep the hoof healthy and functional.

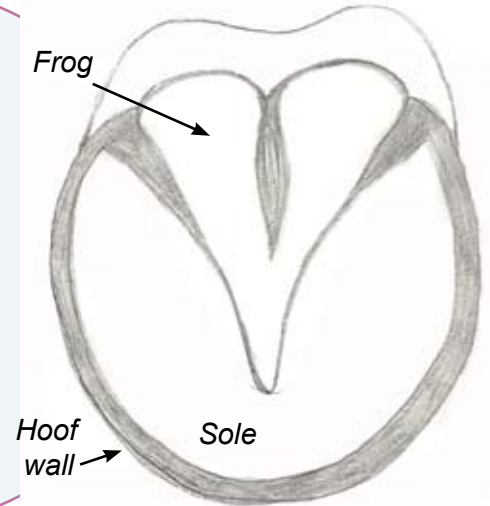
The sole surface under the hoof is in contact with the ground when a horse or pony is standing. It suffers concussion as your pony moves at speed, especially if you are riding him on a hard paddock surface or a dry arena or yard. Ideally, the hoof wall edge around the sole (see diagram) should bear the most weight. It is important to clean out mud, soil and bedding from under the hoof daily, especially before you ride your pony. This should be part of your preparation during saddling before hopping on your pony's back to ride. If the sole is caked with a layer of mud or if a small stone is caught in the grooves of the frog, to your pony, it feels like when you have a pebble in your shoe!

Handy Hint 4

Barefoot Trimming is Often Good for the Hooves

If you are not working your pony on a regular daily basis and only riding him on the weekends, then have the hooves trimmed every 4 weeks by an experienced barefoot specialist farrier to help maintain more natural function within the hooves and save money on fitting shoes. Some ponies with broken away hooves or flat soles on the front hooves, most commonly as a result of an earlier case of founder, are best shod on the front hooves. If your pony is sharing a paddock with other ponies or horses, it is best to leave the hind hooves unshod to reduce the risk of injury to other animals if the pony has a disagreement and kicks out at his paddock mates.

The Pony's Hoof



Monitor the Hooves for Signs of Founder

Handy Hint 6

If your pony is well-conditioned and has 24/7 access to grazing on good pasture, it is important that you keep an eye out for the early signs of founder. These include a short 'proppy' stride at the walk, leaning back on the front limbs, warmth in the hooves and obvious lameness at the trot or canter. If you suspect founder, contact your farrier or vet immediately for advice as the condition can become critical within a few hours unless treated and managed.

Handy Hint 5

Looking After Older Ponies

Healthy, well cared for hooves and strong limbs are essential for maintaining soundness for grazing and exercise. As a pony ages, sound hooves and legs are necessary to enable you to ride and have fun with your pony. Older ponies can often have minor 'wear and tear' injuries from activities in their younger days and these old 'niggling' injuries can become more major causes of lameness and reduced opportunity to work your pony. So it is important to look after your pony's hooves and legs to help prevent the development of problems.

Icing the Hooves of a Pony with Laminitis

Handy Hint 7

The latest recommended first aid for laminitis is to ice the hooves. Gel ice packs do not provide an adequate reserve of heat absorbing capacity. Applying a plastic bag of ice discs or cubes, encircling it around the hooves and wrapping a conforming elastic tape to hold it in position, provides more 'cold' reserve. Punch a small hole in the bottom of each bag to drain away the water as the ice melts.

The ultimate is to stand the horse's affected limbs in a shallow tub (e.g. large plastic dish, cut down plastic drum or large bucket) thick with ice blocks in water up to the fetlock. Most horses with laminitis will stand contentedly for 30 minutes or more in the 'ice bucket' as the ice improves circulation within the lamellae, reduces fluid 'oedema' around the pedal bone and numbs the pain of laminitis. Repeat 3-4 times per day in acute cases. If your pony is suspected of suffering from laminitis, a veterinarian will treat the pony with medications and you can speak to the vet about icing the hooves as part of the treatment.

Healthy Hooves

Over 80% of the lameness problems in ponies originate in the hooves, the most common cause being laminitis or founder, which can affect a pony's long-term soundness.

Over-feeding a pony, especially if it is overweight, by grazing on lush pasture in early spring or grass in late summer that has been rejuvenated by rain, are the most common causes of laminitis or founder. Once a pony suffers an episode of founder, it is likely to be more prone to the problem each year, especially as it ages.

Laminitis or inflammation (internal swelling) in the hooves is an early trigger of founder. The internal damage and collapse within the hooves causes extreme pain, with the front hooves being more likely to suffer the most changes due to more weight being carried over the head, neck and shoulders.

Routine Hoof Care

It is essential to have your pony's hooves trimmed at 4-6 week intervals to avoid hoof wall overgrowth and breakaway of the hoof wall around the edges of the hoof next to the sole, especially in an unshod pony. If your pony is shod, check the shoes each day as you clean the hooves to ensure that they are not loose or that the hoof wall is not growing over the edges of the shoes, especially at the corners of the frog at the heels.

It is important to clean out around the frog with a hoof pick each day, especially if your pony is kept in a wet muddy paddock or yard. The pony's manure and urine can be caught around the frog

and this can lead to ideal conditions of little air (oxygen) that encourages bacteria and mould (fungal) growth. Cleaning out the frog grooves each day will help the frog to maintain its function as a 'shock absorber' in the heel of the hoof, as well as avoid diseases such as 'thrush' and a smelly, oozing infection around the frog which causes discomfort and leads to lameness.

Care of the Legs

Your pony's limbs enable him to move around to graze and carry you when you ride. The front legs carry most of the weight when your pony is walking, trotting and cantering, especially when you are riding in a saddle positioned behind the pony's shoulder. It is important that you check your pony's legs each day for signs of swelling, cuts or missing skin lacerations and skin irritations.

Handy Hint 9

Apply an Ice Pack or Cold Water

If you detect 'warmth' due to inflammation and swelling in the legs and if you cannot find an abrasion or cut and you don't think it is laminitis or founder in the hooves (see Handy Hint 6), then in most cases, hosing the affected area of the leg with cold water will help to remove heat and swelling. You may wish to apply an ice 'gel' pack, held on with a firm (but not tight) bandage of elastic tape (eg Vetwrap®) to help remove the swelling and pain. If the swelling persists, then consult your riding teacher or parent so arrangements can be made to seek advice from a veterinarian.

Apply a Hoof Dressing Regularly

It is a good idea to paint on a hoof dressing to help maintain the natural moisture content of the sole and frog. A new-age hoof dressing, such as **Kohnke's Own Hoof Seal®** provides a thin protective biodegradable film over the hoof wall, sole and frog. It doesn't wear or melt off in the same way as messy oils or creams and it doesn't collect sand, grass or bedding. **Hoof Seal** only needs to be applied twice weekly to the soles in wet or very dry weather, with a once a week application to the whole hoof. Just a thin film needs to be painted onto the hoof and it dries in 10 minutes. It also helps prevent mud and soil from caking to the soles and frog, making it easier to clean out the hooves daily. During cool weather, an application only once a week is required, saving you time and money.

Handy Hint 8

Check the Legs for Warmth

It is good horse keeping practice to run your hand down each of your pony's legs each day before you ride. Always have a headstall on your pony and hold him firmly as you pass your hand down from the knee, cannon bone, fetlock joint and over the hoof wall on each front leg. A firm hold on the lead will avoid him trying to push past or get away if he feels pain and you could be kicked or have your own feet stomped on during his escape! With practice, you should be able to feel warm areas, soft or hard swellings, and observe your pony's reaction if it is painful to him. If you find that one of the front fetlock joints is warm and swollen, compare the degree of heat and swelling by shifting your hand to the other limb. If you determine that an area of the leg feels 'warm' compared to the other limb, then this is a sign of inflammation and increased blood flow in the skin, joint, hoof or bone structure. Walk your pony on a loose lead and observe whether he is taking full weight on his leg(s), or is short in the stride on one leg, or is raising his head ('head bobbing') as the sore or lame limb bears weight. If you are concerned, do not work your pony and ask a parent or riding teacher to check him over too. Never attempt to ride a lame pony - it may be harmful and could make the injury worse, requiring a period of rest and treatment to recover. Remember 'No Foot - No Horse'.

Handy Hint 10

Dangerous Grasses - Sugars, Sugars, Sugars

If your pony is 'cresty' on the neck (the top of the neck feels 'hard' and 'swollen' under the mane), or your pony is very fat, then you must ensure that you limit the time he is allowed to graze on pasture. You can do this by letting him out for 1-2 hours in the morning and afternoon after school, but bring him into a yard (or stable) in the evening before dark and feed him a small amount of soaked hay overnight.

It is important that you restrict your pony's intake of sugars that are contained in grass and hay to help avoid the onset of laminitis and founder, especially if your pony is aging, 'cresty' or overweight.

How to Soak Hay to Remove Soluble Sugars

Soaking high risk grass hay in double its volume of luke-warm water for 1 hour can reduce the sugar and make the hay safer to feed. Drain and air dry the hay before feeding it to your pony. Soaking lucerne hay in the same way can reduce its soluble sugar content by about one quarter. Good quality lucerne hay is lower in sugars to start with, and it is even safer when soaked as compared with good quality grass hay. If all the hay is soaked, then some of the trace-mineral, vitamin and salt content can be leached out into the soaking water. Daily supplementation with **Kohnkes Own Cell-Provide**, will help to

Handy Hint 11

replace these essential nutrients to keep your pony healthy.

Avoid Frost Damaged Pasture

If the grass in your pony's paddock is damaged by a heavy frost(s), then the grass will start to die and wilt, which increases the level of dangerous sugars in the base of the plant. Your pony will find this 'sweet' grass irresistible and might eat more than he needs, risking laminitis and the onset of founder.

Dangerous Grasses

It is essential to restrict your pony from all day and all night grazing of spring pastures or green grass that is growing rapidly after rain when the weather has been warm, particularly if the pasture is made up of 'dangerous grasses' that are commonly grown on dairy or 'cow pastures'. These grasses are ryegrass, fescues, cocksfoot, brome, paspalum and barley grass (southern Australia C3 grasses) or kikuya, couch grass, early growth Rhodes grass and other subtropical or tropical grasses (northern Australia C4 grasses). You could fit your pony with a grazing muzzle during the middle part of the day to restrict how much grass he can eat - talk to your pony club teacher about how and when to fit a grazing muzzle.

If your pony's paddock has an area shaded by trees, then have this area fenced off with a safe electric fence and confine him to this area if the rest of the paddock is lush and green. The grass in the shaded area will normally contain less sugar, will not grow as quickly and will not be damaged as much (if at all) by frosts in late winter and early spring.

Some weeds, especially flatweed (also associated with Australian Stringhalt), dandelion, capeweed, wireweed, thistles and barley grass contain high levels of sugars when they are rapidly growing after rain during warm weather. Limit access to these weeds and shift your pony to an area free of the weeds. Talk to your pony club instructor or an experienced horse parent.

Handy Hint 12

Provide a Supplement to Help Your Pony Lose Weight

Besides restricting your pony's time in the paddock, soaking hay and giving low energy feeds such as Speedi-Beet® or sunflower/lupin/soyabean hulls, you can feed a supplement such as **Kohnke's Own Trim** to assist weight control. **Trim** contains nutrients which have a role in the maintenance of normal blood sugar levels and it helps to strip off excess body fat. Read the label carefully and feed it with soaked hay or low energy feeds as recommended.

Handy Hint 13

Looking After Your Pony's Lungs

1. To help ensure your pony doesn't suffer from lung and lower airway disease it is important to keep his environment free of dust and pollutants so that he doesn't breathe too much of these things in, which could cause damage to his airways.
2. Dampen grass, oaten or lucerne hay before feeding (see Handy Hint 11). Wetting the hay also minimises sugars, leaf loss and reduces waste. Importantly, wetting down hay stops dust and mould from releasing from the hay into the air where your pony might breathe it in.
3. Always makes sure that your pony is removed from the stable when cleaning out soiled bedding to avoid inhalation of dust and ammonia fumes - leave the door open to assist ventilation and return the pony at least 30 minutes later after the dust has settled.
4. Regularly remove cobwebs that accumulate in the rafters above stables (and the feed room) as the dust can harbour bacteria and moulds, which can dislodge in damp weather or a breeze. A regular spray for spiders and other insects will help minimise cobwebs.
5. Feeds can be dampened with plain tap water just before feeding. A cupful of half apple cider vinegar and half water per 20 litres of feed is also useful to bind dust, makes the feed tastier and encourages salivation which is good for your pony's digestion.
6. Avoid Dusty Bedding. Studies to compare bedding materials in stabled horses have found that the relatively large dust particles in sawdust and shavings are trapped in the nasal and upper airways and are less likely to cause your pony to cough.
7. If your pony suffers ongoing respiratory problems, it might be helpful to talk to a parent about having the wall and floors washed with a steam cleaner and also to remove cobwebs and clean all feed bins, waterers and feed buckets to reduce overall bacterial and fungal contamination in the stable environment.
8. Always feed all hay (dampened) in safe floor/ground feeders - eg recycled tyre feed bins to encourage lower airway drainage.
9. Avoid working your pony through a dusty haze created from a previous lap of a very dry and dusty arena or work area. Keep an eye on where the dust is created and avoid that area as you're riding.

Keeping Your Pony Cool

Some Helpful Advice

If you work your pony on a hot day, it is possible that he will become 'hot & bothered', sweat heavily and become stressed by the heat. This is more likely if your pony is very fat, has a thick coat, or you ride him too hard or for more than 40-60 minutes under warm to hot conditions (30-35°C or more) during the day.

It is best under hot conditions to ride or work your pony during the early morning before it becomes too hot, or in the cool of the evening before the sun sets.

If your pony becomes very hot, then he may become incoordinated, weak or collapse due to heat exhaustion.

Here are some helpful hints to keep your pony cool.

1. Ensure that he has plenty of cool, clean water to drink. Clean out the water trough or bucket regularly to remove slime, algae or dirt.
2. If he has a long shaggy coat, perhaps you should have him clipped to help him sweat and lose heat more efficiently.

Note: If your pony does not lose his winter coat until summer and he is over 18 years of age and losing weight, he may have a condition called 'Cushings Disease' - talk to your pony club instructor or your vet about this disease, as you may be able to treat it to help him lead a happy life so that you can continue to ride him.

3. After working your pony, wash him down with cold water from a bucket or spray him with cold water from the hose in the wash bay to help him cool down. Apply the cold water to his underbelly area as this is where a lot of excess heat is stored during exercise. Always scrape the water off to remove the 'warm' water and enable him to 'steam off' to evaporate the moisture layer on his skin. If you do not scrape him off, he is likely to retain more heat and may become overheated and collapse.
4. Take him for a walk for 5-10 minutes to help him cool out his legs and body after washing or hosing him off.
5. Once he has cooled out, place a light rug on him if it is cool to help prevent him suffering a 'chill' from being wet and cold.
6. If your pony becomes weak, incoordinated or collapses, apply cold water over his body and head, especially under his tummy.

Encouraging a Pony to Drink

Offer your pony a medium bucket of of luke-warm water, with 2 teaspoonsful of plain, fine table salt added per litre (50g or 2½ tablespoonsful table salt in 5 litres luke-warm water) after taking the bridle and gear off in the wash bay, to help him rehydrate. Ponies can be trained to drink this simple rehydration mix by offering it to them each time they come back from training or after they come off the float after travelling.

Handy Hint 14



Combined with a low GI diet, **TRIM** provides nutritional support to assist sugar and fat metabolism to help strip off 'cresty' necks and abnormal fat deposits.

Product of the Month

TRIM



Disclaimer: The information and recommendations in this newsletter have been presented as a guideline based on the veterinary experience and knowledge of the author, Dr John Kohnke BVSc RDA. Whilst all care, diligence and years of practical experience have been combined to produce this information, the author/editor, Dr John Kohnke, accepts no responsibility or liability for unforeseen consequences resulting from the hints and advice given in this newsletter.

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