

DIY Wound Treatment

Part I

by Sarah Van Dyk, BVSc (Hons)

Finding your horse with a wound can be a stressful situation but it is one which all horse owners will inevitably find themselves in at some stage.

In this 3 part series, Dr from WestVETS will address the different types of wounds, first aid treatment and when to call a vet.

It is difficult to categorise wounds as the seriousness of a wound is dependent on location, size, depth and structures involved and how old the wound is.

For example, a wound may appear small like a puncture wound over the fetlock but if it communicates with joint or tendon sheath, the consequences can be very serious and can lead to chronic lameness or even euthanasia.

For this reason, if you discover a wound on your horse that you have any doubts about, it is always a good idea to talk to your veterinarian.

General Principles of Wound Healing

Wounds heal the quickest in a warm, moist, clean environment with good blood supply and minimal movement. This means covering the wound to prevent the wound from drying out initially, minimising movement as much as possible and keeping the wound clean.

In general, wounds that occur on the neck and body heal well with careful topical treatment however wounds on the lower limbs are more problematic as there is less loose skin, more movement, relatively poor blood supply, and lower tissue temperature.

Delayed wound healing on the lower limb can allow the formation of exuberant granulation tissue or proud flesh which is a common complication.

Types of wounds

The first types of wounds that will be discussed are those of the less serious kind that may not necessarily need veterinary attention. More severe and complicated wounds will be discussed in subsequent editions.

It is very important that you establish that the wound involves the skin and superficial tissues only, and does not involve the underlying bone or joint or tendon sheath. Examples of these include superficial skin scrapes, small superficial cuts, rubs, grazes and burns. Many of these types of wounds occur from contact with posts, gates, fencing, trees, sticks, ropes and altercations with paddock mates.

Cleaning the wound

When initially cleaning a superficial wound, saline irrigation is best however if you don't have access to saline, simply hosing the wound with water is fine.

Very dilute povidone-iodine, betadine or chlorhexadine can also be used. All foreign material and dead tissue should be removed, leaving the wound and skin edges clean, moist and healthy.

Managing your horse's wound

Always make sure your horse is up to date with a tetanus vaccination.

Superficial wounds that have scraped the hair and outer surface of skin generally don't need any topical treatment unless there are injuries to the underlying tissues which may require cold hosing or anti-inflammatories to control the swelling. For small skin wounds and grazes, a topical spray or ointment containing an antiseptic, insect repellent and a steroid for its anti-inflammatory properties can be applied. For burns or abrasions from rope, cold hose the area immediately then treat the wound appropriately.

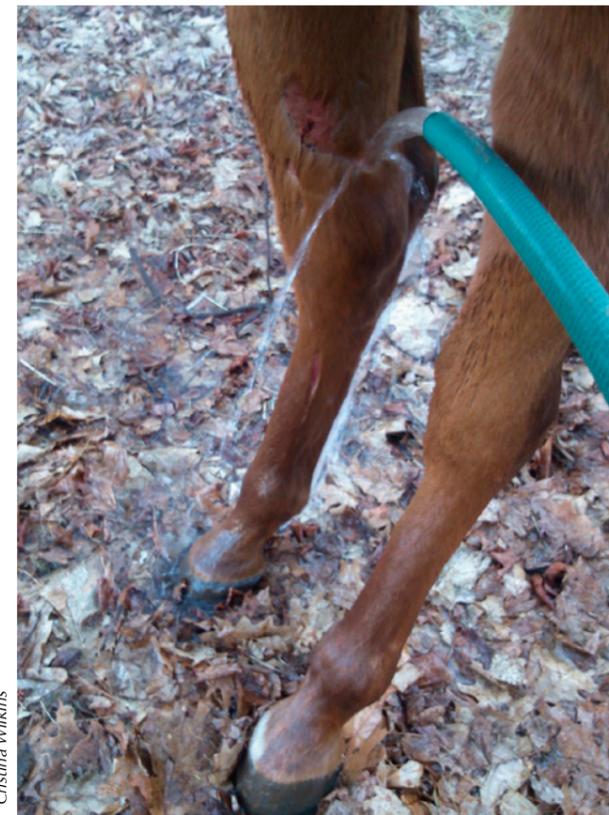
Full thickness skin wounds generally heal well with stitching if they are relatively fresh but can be managed without stitches. If the wound is on the neck or body, an antiseptic ointment or spray can be applied around the edges of the wound.

“It is very important that you establish that the wound involves the skin and superficial tissues only, and does not involve the underlying bone or joint or tendon sheath.

If the wound is on the lower limbs, a non-stick wound dressing and firm layered bandage provides more support for the wound to speed the healing process.

For larger skin wounds that have exposed the underlying tissue, it is best to avoid most topical antibiotic ointments, powders and sprays in the wound itself as this causes irritation and dries out the tissue which delays healing. To manage these, it is best to cover the wound with a non-stick dressing and a firm bandage or if this is not possible, topical antiseptics with or without insect repellents are better applied around the edges of the wound. In these instances it is best to avoid preparations that contain a steroid as it can slow wound healing in the early stages.

There are many wound ointments and sprays available on the market; choosing which to use is largely dependent on what works best for you and is too wide a subject to delve into for this article. Anecdotally, success has been seen with applying certain types of honey directly into wounds as it acts as a natural antiseptic and keeps the wound moist however you do need to be aware that it may also attract unwanted insects.



Cristina Wilkins

Superficial wounds may require cold hosing or anti-inflammatories to control the swelling



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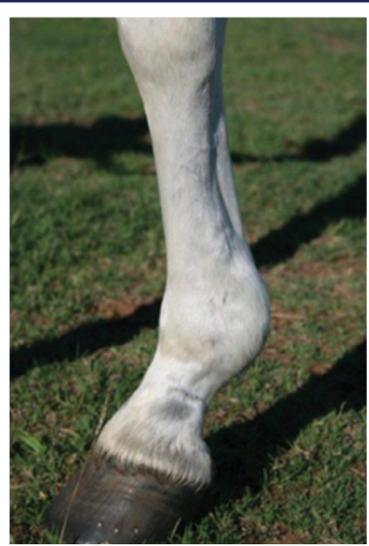
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A nasty wire wound

Constriction wounds caused by wire or rope or electrical tape being wrapped around a limb can be difficult wounds to manage. In many cases there appears to be only superficial damage to the skin, however depending how tightly and how long the wire had been wrapped around the limb, there is great potential for skin and tissue necrosis and sloughing as a consequence of loss of blood supply.

In these cases it is best to consult your veterinarian before attempting to treat the wounds on your own.



Maxine Ellison

It is important to clean the wound frequently. Saline is preferable but warm water or very dilute betadine is also appropriate.

Continuing treatment and progress

In the days following the initial treatment of a wound, monitor your horse's appetite, demeanour, pain and lameness. If you have access to a thermometer; check your horse's rectal temperature daily. Wounds often look worst 3-5 days after they occur so do not be alarmed by this. If you notice signs of infection such as swelling, increased tenderness, redness around the wound and thick yellow, green or brown discharge consult your veterinarian immediately.



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Ongoing care really depends on how the healing is progressing. For the unbandaged wound, it is important to clean the wound frequently. Again, saline is preferable but warm water or very dilute betadine is also appropriate.

Be careful not to disrupt the healing tissue or skin edges but make sure you remove any foreign material and excess exudate from in and around the wound. Then antiseptic ointment can be reapplied around the edges of the wound.

If the wound is drying out with a healthy scab, it is ok to leave the scab in place as it provides a natural bandaid to protect the underlying tissue while it heals. If there is pus under the scab, it is best to remove it and clean the wound.



“ If you notice signs of infection such as swelling, increased tenderness, redness around the wound and thick yellow, green or brown discharge consult your veterinarian immediately. **”**

For bandaged wounds, if the wound is producing a lot of exudate, the bandage needs to be changed more frequently, for example every 2nd day initially for the first week or so, then every 3-5 days thereafter. Once a good granulation bed has formed and the skin has contracted to close the wound, bandaging can be stopped and topical preparations can be used.

Most non complicated skin wounds should heal in approximately 2-3 weeks. There are some wounds which just do not heal as expected or continue to discharge serous or purulent material. This could indicate a deep infection or damage to the underlying bone which warrants veterinary attention.

Although treating your horse's wound yourself can be daunting at first, careful monitoring and knowing what signs to look out for will lead to a successful outcome for you and your horse.



Courtesy of Proud Aid

Delayed wound healing on the lower limb can allow the formation of exuberant granulation tissue or proud flesh which is a common complication.



are small animal surgery, farm animal medicine and surgery and equine medicine and reproduction. She also enjoys being attending veterinarian at endurance rides and other equestrian events. In her spare time, enjoys snowsports, art, horseriding and long distance running.

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