



Lilydale Clinic

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Horse leg wounds

Horse leg wounds are very common. They usually occur on the lower limb and are most often due to entanglement with a wire fence. They can be expensive and frustrating to treat. However with good care and careful attention they can usually heal very well.

Initially when assessing the wound, the vet will examine the wound thoroughly to determine its depth and whether there is any involvement of joints, tendons or bone, as this changes the prognosis and treatment of the wound. Usually however, it is a wound where a varying degree of skin has been removed. Sometimes there is a flap of skin associated with the wound, this may or may not be able to be stitched in place. Unless the flap is dead, it is usually not trimmed at the first visit as some of the flap may adhere back to the wound, reducing healing time. The wound is usually cleaned and a bandage applied, and the horse is boosted for tetanus. Medications dispensed are usually antiinflammatories/pain relief (such as bute) and antibiotics (such as penicillin).

The first phase is the healing or granulation phase. This usually takes 2-4 weeks depending on the size of the wound. During this period the wound is still susceptible to infection and the horse should be confined from moving around in a yard or stable, a bandage applied and antibiotics given. The ideal cream to use is one that is antibacterial but contain no cortisone (as this will delay healing). Examples are flamazine (prescription), manuka honey, white healer or potties white ointment. These are also useful to prevent the wound from drying out. Close veterinary attention (weekly visits) is recommended during this phase to assess healing is progressing and ensure there is no infection or bandage related complications such as pressure sores. The bandage should be changed regularly in this early phase, every 2 days is good.

The second phase is the re-epithelialisation phase. This is where the new skin needs to grow over the wound. Skin will not grow over the wound if it is

- 1) Mobile – bandaging and confinement helps
- 2) Infected
- 3) There is proud flesh.

Skin will not grow uphill. Horses are unique in that the bed of granulation tissue will continue to grow once it has filled the wound. When it grows outwards away from the wound, forming a mound of tissue, it is called “proud flesh”. Proud flesh is a problem as it will prevent normal skin from growing over the wound and will thus impede healing of the wound.

Techniques for managing proud flesh to ensure timely and uncomplicated wound healing are

- Trimming by vet: This tissue contains no nerve endings and thus can be literally shaved off.
- Cortisone or astringent lotions and creams to retard growth of the tissue. Supervision by a vet is essential as over use or use of the wrong cream/lotion will delay wound healing.
- Ongoing bandaging and confinement. However the bandage can be now changed less frequently – 2 times weekly is usually enough.

Vet visits are recommended every 1-2 weeks during this phase.

For a large leg wound to be completely covered with normal skin can take up to 6-12 months.

Horses legs do not have a strong blood supply and this heal slowly. The other option is to leave the bandage off once the wound is granulated. This is cheaper but NOT recommended as large volumes of proud flesh will form, the wound may become infected with maggots, it will heal in a very large and bulky fashion that may impede movement of the leg or it may never fully heal.

If your horse has a wound and you would like a veterinarian to examine it, please contact us on 9739 5244.