

First Aid Management of Wounds

Wounds are very common injuries in equines and it is vital for the horse owner to be able to evaluate the severity of a cut. Some wounds can be managed without veterinary assistance but many will require professional attention. It may be possible to provide important first aid before the vet arrives.

Innocuous-looking wounds can be the most dangerous, so if you are in any doubt as to the significance of a wound it is best to contact your vet for advice.



What should I do if....

1. THE WOUND IS BLEEDING HEAVILY?

Apply a dressing to the wound and apply several layers of cotton wool or gamgee, then bandage as tightly as possible. In an emergency, tail or exercise bandages can be used, but always put padding underneath them. If blood seeps through the bandage, apply more layers very firmly. Even arterial bleeding can usually be stemmed like this. For wounds in areas that can't be bandaged, maintain firm hand pressure over the wound using clean padding. Call the vet to attend as soon as possible to provide further treatment.

2. THE HORSE IS VERY LAME?

If the horse will not place any weight on the limb at all, leave it where it is in case there is a fracture underneath the wound. If the horse is able to walk, very slowly move it to a clean yard or stable if possible. Your vet should always be called if the horse is obviously lame and has a wound in case a joint or tendon sheath infection is present.

3. THERE IS SOMETHING IN THE WOUND?

If a foreign body is visible in the wound, leave it in place if at all possible and call the vet to attend. This may help your vet to evaluate the damage and it may be dangerous, to yourself and the horse, to remove it.



FIRST AID KIT ESSENTIALS:

- antiseptic solution e.g. chlorhexidine to be used as a very dilute solution
- antiseptic cream
- sterile saline
- sterile non-adherent dressings
- cotton wool
- bandages
- sticky tape
- scissors
- thermometer.

First Aid treatment of a wound

- Check if the horse is lame. If it is, call your vet.
- Clean the wound gently. Gross contamination (such as with mud) can be hosed with water on a low pressure. Dirty wounds can be cleaned with a very dilute antiseptic solution. Small clean wounds can be flushed with sterile saline. Trim any long hair from around the wound.
- Check if the wound is over a joint or tendon sheath. Puncture wounds into these structures can be disastrous if not treated within 24-48 hours so if in any doubt call your vet. Clear fluid trickling from a wound over a joint could be joint fluid.
- Decide if the wound requires veterinary attention (e.g. for severe bleeding, suturing, puncture wounds, lameness, etc.).
- Apply a sterile non-adherent dressing to the wound. Follow with cotton wool or gamgee, then elastic bandage. Always ensure there is sufficient padding and that a finger can easily be inserted under the bandage. Sticky pads are available to cover wounds on areas which can't be bandaged.



WOUNDS OVER JOINTS REQUIRE URGENT VETERINARY TREATMENT TO PREVENT AN INCURABLE SEPTIC JOINT INFECTION

Wound healing

Wounds can heal either by primary or secondary intention.

- Primary intention: this means that the wound edges are sutured (stitched) or stapled together. This is only possible with clean, fresh wounds in some areas of the body. The final result is usually neat and healing is often quicker



SECONDARY INTENTION HEALING

- Secondary intention: this means that the wound heals without the benefit of stitches or staples but forms granulation tissue instead, before the skin grows over the top. Granulation tissue is pink, bleeds easily and produces a film of yellowish fluid. These wounds often take longer to heal and may form 'proud flesh' (excessive granulation tissue). Unfortunately, most wounds on the lower limbs of horses have to heal by secondary intention because the lack of elasticity in the skin makes it difficult for the wound edges to come together.



XLEquine is a novel and exciting initiative conceived from within the veterinary profession made up of independently owned, progressive veterinary practices located throughout the United Kingdom, members of XLEquine are committed to working together for the benefit of all their clients.
© XLVet UK Ltd.

No part of this publication may be reproduced without prior permission of the publisher.

For further information contact your local XLEquine practice:

www.xlequine.co.uk