

## Wounds

Horses are flight animals, when they panic they run away from the danger. In doing so they commonly bump into things which cut, tear and gouge at the skin. Foals have thin skin as do finer horses like Thoroughbreds but even heavy horses have relatively easily damaged skin.

Wounds can be minor and almost insignificant or very impressive with large areas of skin loss. Below the knee and hock there is no muscle mass to both protect the bones, tendons, joints and ligaments and help in wound closure. 70% of the wound surface area can be eliminated by the underlying muscles contracting and so drawing the wound edges together. This cannot happen in the lower limbs and as skin can only grow at a maximum of 1mm per day it is essential to maintain all viable skin tissue.



This foal suffered a severe degloving injury with the skin pulled off the front / inside of the cannon. After initial cleaning and tacking back in place followed by twice weekly dressings the foal was anaesthetised ad the wound again cleaned before the limb was set in a fibreglass cast. This allowed excellent healing over 3 weeks with minimal scarring.

Size isn't everything and small wounds or penetrations can enter a joint or tendon sheath with very serious or catastrophic results. So if the wound is close to a joint or tendon sheath and especially if the horse is very lame despite only a small wound get your vet to examine the horse promptly. With quick evaluation and treatment the horse can be returned to work but the treatment may involve general anaesthetic and arthroscopy. This is where a small instrument is placed within the joint / tendon sheath to visualise the damage and further instruments used to remove damaged tissues with many litres of sterile fluids used to flush the space clean and the horse being treated with antibiotics and anti inflammatory drugs.

To start with horse owners worry about bleeding. If you can count the drops of blood it is not much to worry about. If the blood comes as a stream then pressure is the first line of treatment. Use some gamgee or similar and bandage it over the wound. Place another piece of gamgee over the first and place the second bandage more firmly and if necessary repeat this



This severe hoof wound bled profusely but healed well.

If bleeding is not too severe it is best to clean the wound with clean water. Disinfectants or antiseptics are best avoided unless they are needed to help loosen the mud. If your vet decides the wound is best stitched then it is better that you have not contaminated the wound with purple spray or wound powders. Hydrogels can be used as they are water soluble and beneficial to wound healing. Next use a melonin type of dressing (non adhesive) and a light bandage to prevent further wound contamination.

Some wounds are cleaned up with a mixture of sharp debridement with a scalpel and pressure washing with sterile fluids before being dressed for a few days and then stitched at a future visit. Others are left open and kept dressed as wounds heal more rapidly when moist. Stitched wounds heal over 10-14 days while delayed closure wounds take 14-21 and those left to heal under dressings may take many weeks due to the skin deficits.

Wounds over the fronts of fetlocks and hocks are the worst to heal quickly due to the constant movement. Proud flesh occurs on the wounds of horses due to infection, movement or lack of skin. Occasionally vets put a cast on lower limb wounds to speed up healing as the cast stops movement so limiting the occurrence of proud flesh. (see above)

