

## Farrier Emergencies

*Welcome back to the Hoof Care Corner, a series of short articles written to educate horse enthusiasts about a variety of hoof care topics, ranging in scope from “the benefits of barefoot” to “when wedge pads matter”. Our topic today is emergency farrier care- knowing what to do and who to call when the unexpected happens.*

Some time ago a client called to say her gelding had stepped on a nail and was too lame for the routine appointment. The vet had already been out, and the x-ray looked clean. Just bute, antibiotics and rest. I asked if she left the nail in when she found it; sheepishly, she admitted she hadn't the heart to, and the vet had already scolded her for removing it prior to taking an x-ray. Leaving the foreign object in place enables the radiograph to show what internal structures may have been penetrated. How many of us would have left a bloody nail in the foot when a pair of pliers can make it all better? Not many, I imagine. Read on for a farrier's perspective on the most appropriate first steps following a hoof-related emergency. Finally we'll review a list of handy farrier items to keep on hand in the barn to help when the time comes.

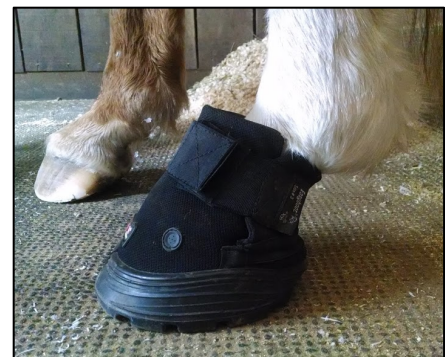
Punctures to the foot by foreign objects are always possible, even in the most fastidious barn-keeping settings. Screws and nails dropped during fencing repairs, bits of wire, the odd piece of metal on trail or in a driveway, and (though I'm loathe to mention it) farrier nails gone astray are all candidates for puncturing the bottom of the foot. So your horse is suddenly non-weight bearing on a limb and you lift it to find a nail poking out of the frog, bleeding profusely. What do you do? 1. Do not remove the object. 2. Call the vet immediately and possibly the farrier. Finally, it may be helpful to create an “emergency shoe” for the horse. Using a 2” thick foam block and magic marker, trace the outline of the foot and cut the foam to fit using a hand saw or bread knife. Cut a generous notch where the object has penetrated so no foam touches there. Duct tape or vet-wrap the block to the foot using strong wraps around the perimeter of the foot. This may allow your horse to bear some weight on the foot before the vet and farrier arrive to x-ray the object and conduct the appropriate treatment and follow-up farrier care.



Abscesses are another foot-related reason why horses may become suddenly 3-legged lame. An abscess is an infection in the foot causing localized pressure due to fluid build-up against the inflexible hoof capsule. Heat in the foot and swelling low in the affected limb, along with reluctance to bear weight are common symptoms. What do you do? 1. Call the vet

and/or farrier. 2. Provide soft footing for the horse until your farrier or vet arrive. Likely they will examine the foot with hoof testers and an abscess probe to determine whether the infected site is accessible from the solar surface. If your horse is shod, each nail should be pressured and then the shoe removed to determine if nail placement or sole pressure from the shoe is the culprit. Often the infection is deeper in the foot, necessitating a combination program of poultice wrapping and soaking to soften the hoof capsule and mobilize the infected fluid to the surface. To soak, use a bucket of warm water and Epsom salts to draw the infection. To poultice, fill a child's diaper (yes, you've read that correctly) with medicated poultice available at most feed stores. Affix it to the foot using vet wrap and finish with a duct tape base on the foot side to prevent tearing. Typically 1-3 days of soaking and poulticing will cause the abscess to erupt, usually along the coronary band or at the heel bulbs, providing immediate relief for the horse.

Laminitis or founder is another pathology resulting in sudden onset lameness in horses. Laminae are the microscopically thin fibers that work like a zipper attachment between the hoof wall and the pedal bone, suspending that bone inside the foot. Inflammation of the lamina often results in severe pain, similar to the pain one might experience tearing a fingernail. In severe cases of laminitis, the "zipper" may fail, resulting in rotation or sinking of the bone inside the hoof capsule. This pedal bone displacement is called founder and it can happen virtually overnight. Typically discomfort is bi-lateral, involving both front feet or possibly all four hooves. The classic laminitic stance is a horse rocked back on her hind end with the front legs splayed out ahead. She is reluctant to walk and lamest when turning. What do you do? 1. Call the vet and farrier. 2. Move her to a soft area, ideally bedded at least 10" deep with shavings. 3. Withhold feed high in sugar including grain, grass and rich hay. 4. Cool the limbs. Use cold water hosing, ice boots, or thick wool socks filled with ice cubes and duct taped below the knee. 5. Use a therapeutic boot (see photo), or employ your farrier's help to create an emergency shoe that transfers load-bearing to the back of the foot and removes pressure from the toe. This helps keep them comfortable until the vet can arrive to x-ray the foot and help direct follow-up farrier care. Radiographs for the laminitic horse are critical to determine the presence and extent of pedal bone rotation. Imaging guides initial treatment and provides a baseline for evaluating the changes in the foot during follow-up care.



What is the common theme in all these scenarios? Call the vet. As both farrier and horse owner myself, I believe it is important to seek out professional advice when dealing with sudden onset, severe lameness, even when you think you know the cause. Permanent damage can result if your "hunch" is wrong, and you spend 2 weeks treating an injury that does not exist while overlooking the real problem. I once attended a horse suspected by the owner of suffering from an abscess. Upon examination I found significant swelling inside the hock joint that had gone un-noticed. Turns out the horse had ruptured ligaments and was placed on four months of stall rest. My personal rule of thumb is, if the horse is lame at the walk, call the vet, pronto.

Before I leave you with a list of emergency farrier items to keep on hand, let's discuss the easiest of all "emergencies"- the loose shoe. So you go to fetch Howdy from the pasture and he gimps up, one shoe dangling. Try as you might, you can't pull it off with just your hands. The farrier can't be there till tomorrow. What do you do?

If you have all the items on the emergency farrier list below, this is a breeze... Use your pull-offs to loosen the shoe and then pull each nail one at a time using nail-pullers. Rasp off any sharp hoof wall. Ask your farrier to show you how to do this next time he is at your barn.

If you can't pull the shoe, read on. If the horse is lame, tell your farrier and she will likely come immediately. If the horse is sound, grab your handy duct tape and wrap around the perimeter of the foot several times. This will hold the shoe and nails in place and prevent damage to the hoof wall during movement. Confine your horse to stall or paddock until the farrier arrives.

As in any animal emergency, it helps to be prepared. Consider assembling the items below and adding them to your barn medical kit. Clearly mark your medical kit and share its location with other boarders and staff. My own opinion is that in a true emergency, anyone's medical kit is fair game. Be prepared to share, but expect used items to be replaced in a timely fashion. Finally, be safe, ride often, and thanks for reading!

### Farrier Emergency Item List

1. Name and phone number for current vet and farrier
2. Shoe pullers, crease nail-pullers and wire brush, available online or at local feed store
3. Old rasp- ask your farrier for one
4. Duct tape
5. 2 rolls vet wrap
6. Pack of diapers
7. Medicated poultice- available at most feed stores
8. Bag of Epsom Salts
9. Soak boot or bag
10. Therapeutic hoof boot- I like EasyCare's Rx Boot, one size larger than the hoof measures.
11. Hoof sized squares of 2" thick rigid foam board, available at Home Depot

