**Hoof Care**

**No Hoof !! – No Horse !!**

Many different hoof problems can occur in horses, but looking after and caring for a horse’s hooves will safeguard its long-term soundness. A balanced hoof allows the horse to move better and puts less stress and strain on bones, tendons and ligaments.

Proper nutrition and hoof supplements can help improve hoof quality but most importantly hooves should be trimmed or shod at least every six to eight weeks, *thoroughbreds are likely to require trimming/shoeing every 5 weeks as unfortunately they often inherit poor quality hooves and are more susceptible to problems occurring*. Some farriers believe hoof oils and moisturizers help condition hooves, whilst other farriers will advise that those products are a waste of money (and they can cause problems where a hoof is softened rather than being hard as nails).

It is important that hooves are picked out daily, especially in wet weather as they can develop a condition called Thrush, or if they’re kept on rocky ground. Stones imbedded in a hoof can cause sole bruising, which can result in an abscess. Thrush is foul-smelling and is usually found around the frog, it is associated with wet, soiled conditions (like dirty yards that are not cleaned of manure and old feed daily). Both Thrush and abscesses can invade sensitive tissues in the hoof and cause lameness. Dry weather conditions can cause damage to the hoof too. During dry weather, or with frequent changes from wet to dry, horses are prone to having dry, brittle feet that easily develop hoof cracks, regular farriering will ensure any issues that occur year round are discovered early before problems result in a horse becoming unsound.

Laminitis is inflammation of the laminae. Also called founder, laminitis occurs when the internal coffin bone rotates downward inside the hoof capsule. There are several causes of laminitis, with obesity being the most common. Treatments include regular shoeing or trimming and frog and sole support and a strict balanced diet. It is easy perhaps to imagine the laminae being Velcro – the hoof wall is held in place by that Velcro onto the coffin bone and if laminitis occurs it means the laminae is like old Velcro that no long sticks together…

Maintaining a horse’s nutrition can help alleviate some hoof problems. Feeding good quality hay, supplementing with appropriate vitamins and minerals, and making sure the horse has fresh clean water is important for both hoof health and overall horse health.

Since most horses have different hoof issues and growth rates, a good relationship with a qualified farrier is needed to ensure a healthy, sound hoof and horse. You can reduce hoof problems by doing a few simple things;

* Daily cleaning of hooves
* Regular trimming or shoeing
* Maintaining proper horse nutrition
* Appropriate treatment if problems occur