

Managing wounds in horses – Owner Guide

Assessing the wound

Horse wounds can have a range of complications such as poor healing due to skin tension or infection¹. This means that it is important to assess the wound so that you can apply basic first aid if appropriate and look out for signs that indicate veterinary advice is recommended. Do not put yourself at risk by examining a horse that is distressed or painful. If you are in any doubt then speak to your vet first.



The following always require veterinary examination²:

1. Any wound or injury that makes your horse lame or sore
2. Puncture wounds (as there can be significant unseen damage beneath the skin)
3. Wounds that expose any tissue underneath the skin
4. Wounds that still have something in them (e.g. dirt, nails, splinters – do not attempt to remove)
5. Injury to the eye or eyelids
6. Injuries that may interfere with tack
7. Horse kick injuries
8. Wounds that have made the surrounding area feel hot to the touch
9. Wounds that have visible discharge, particularly if smelly
10. Wounds that are close to or over the joint
11. When healing is delayed or 'proud flesh' appears
12. If a horse is not up-to-date with their tetanus vaccination



Basic wound first aid

If your horse is bleeding then apply firm pressure to the area with a thick gamgee or lint dressing if it is safe to do so. Contact your vet if the bleeding continues after five minutes of pressure or the bleeding is profuse.

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If the wound is a minor skin abrasion and you feel confident at applying first aid you can follow these steps³:

1. **Consider clipping** – You might decide to trim the area around the wound, especially if your horse has a thick winter coat. This can help to see the area more easily and monitor the wound progression, but is not essential. Take care to avoid getting hairs in the wound as this can cause irritation and infection. Only do this step if your horse is used to clippers and unlikely to react.
2. **Clean the wound** – It is best to use some lukewarm saline solution to clean the wound to remove any contamination. You can make this yourself using boiled water that has been left to cool and adding table salt. If this isn't an option then potable water from a hose is the next best option.
3. **Reassess** – Once you can see the wound more clearly, reassess whether there are any signs of concern. If it is deeper than you first thought, or fits into any of the above criteria then be sure to seek veterinary advice. If you identify any 'foreign bodies' such as nails or wood, do not remove these yourself as this could cause damage to underlying structures.
4. **Apply antiseptic** – Keep a suitable antiseptic in your first aid box to apply to minor wounds. We recommend discussing this with your vet as some antiseptics can be very stringent on skin which may irritate and cause further damage. Omnimatrix is a skin cream that is suitable for all stages of healing and is naturally antiseptic. It can be applied twice daily to the affected area. We recommend using gloves to apply any ointments so that you avoid directly touching the wound in case of infection.
5. **Apply a dressing** – Only apply a dressing if you are confident in doing so, and the wound is not close to a mobile area such as a joint. A sterile, non-adhesive dressing is best and should be applied with firm, but not excessive pressure (as this can cause further damage). Dressings should be changed regularly so that changes in the wound can be monitored.
6. **Monitor progress** – If the wound is not healing, your horse becomes sore, or there are any signs of infections or other concerns then call your vet for advice.

References:

1 <https://aaep.org/horsehealth/wounds-horses>

2 <https://www.rossdales.com/services/sport-and-leisure-horses/routine-stable-visits/wound-management>

3 <https://www.yourhorse.co.uk/advice/horse-care/articles/step-by-step-guide-to-treating-a-wound>



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