Bruised Sole

What is a bruised sole?

Bruised soles are one of the most common causes of lameness in both shod and unshod horses. Injury to the sole may cause damage to the sensitive structures underneath and this results in 'bruising'. The result is often damage to the many tiny blood vessels underneath the sole and consequent haemorrhage (bleeding). This may either resolve quickly and cause no further problems or may result in the formation of a haematoma ('blood blister') between the sensitive tissues and the non-expandable sole. The pressure caused by this 'blister' on the sensitive tissues causes pain and lameness. Even if a haematoma does not develop, there may be sufficient damage to the laminae of the sole to result in pain and lameness.

How is a bruised sole diagnosed?

- Most commonly, the horse may become suddenly lame or may appear to recover but be lame again the next day

- The lameness usually affects one leg only and pain can often be located by a farrier or veterinary surgeon with pressure carefully applied with hoof testers

- Once the area of sole pain has been established, sole paring over this area reveals a visible bruise, i.e. a reddened area of sole. In some cases, the strength of the pulse in the heel arteries (digital pulse) may be increased, when palpated with a finger, and the feet may appear warm to the touch

What are the most common causes of a bruised sole?

- An accidental injury to the sole of the foot

- Treading on a stone or another hard object

- Poorly fitting shoes

- Excessive work on hard ground, especially when unshod

- Foot trauma is predisposed by thin soles in some horses

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How is a bruised sole treated?

The horse's shoes are removed and then the sole is pared over the bruise to relieve weight-bearing pressure. Excessive paring should be avoided in thin soled horses or the pain may be worsened. A poultice and protective bandage is then applied to the foot. The poultice is removed after 24-hours and the protective bandage is replaced for a further 48-hours. The foot is then trimmed and shod when the foot is no longer painful.

How can a bruised sole be prevented?

- All horse's feet should be regularly trimmed/ shod by a qualified farrier

- Horses feet should always be picked and thoroughly cleaned out before exercise

- Exercise on uneven and stony ground should be avoided, particularly for thin soled horses

- Protective hoof pads can be used for thin soled horses. These are layers of rubber or leather that are fitted between the foot and the shoe so that the entire sole is covered in an attempt to prevent bruising of the sole. Although, stones and other objects may become trapped between them and the sole. Pads also prevent the essential daily task of thoroughly inspecting the solar surface of the foot and frog

Caution!

- Sometimes laminitis can be confused with bruised soles - if in doubt, treat as laminitis and consult your vet

- A foot abscess (infection) can cause a similar type of sudden lameness with focal pain

- Solar abscesses also commonly occur in horses and in such cases the abscess must be found, drained and poulticed without delay or serious complications can occur

- If sole pads are to be used, shoeing horses with pads is a job for a specifically-experienced farrier

- Please call the practice if your horse does not make satisfactory progress, i.e. is not significantly more comfortable, within 48 hours

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This factsheet was created by the VetPartners Equine Team, with assistance from our Marketing Team and Veterinary Regulatory Advisors.

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