

Wound Management and Bandaging

Unfortunately, horses are very good at injuring themselves despite their owner's best attempts to avoid this, so it is important to have some basic first aid knowledge to be prepared for these situations. Once a wound or injury is identified your vet should be contacted- this may just be for advice or may need a visit depending on the severity.

Firstly, assess your horse – is this an emergency?

1. Are they able to walk? If not call your vet immediately and keep your horse still and calm where they are while you wait for your vet to arrive.
2. How lame are they at walk? If lameness seen at walk your vet should be called for an examination however if your horse is comfortable and happy to walk with no signs of active bleeding try to move them to a clean, calm environment such as their stable until the vet arrives.
3. Are there any signs of active bleeding? If blood is slowly leaking from a wound this is not a concern however if any high-pressure bleeding occurs this may need immediate attention, call your vet immediately and then apply pressure to the wound. Your vet will then advise you what to do next until they arrive.
4. Is my horse Tetanus vaccinated?

If bleeding is minimal and your horse is not showing any signs of discomfort the next stage is to clean the wound. This can either be done with dilute hibiscrub solution, if available, or simply by flushing the area using tap water or a hose pipe. A bandage should then be placed until your vet arrives for a thorough examination, avoid applying any creams to the wound until your vet has checked them.

Why Do I Need A Vet Examination Following A Wound?

The majority of wounds are easily managed with no further complications however we always recommend these are checked by your vet.

They will assess whether there is any risk from the wound of infection into a joint space which may need surgical intervention to flush and clean the joint itself. It should be noted that even a tiny wound can have this complication dependant on the wound location and proximity to the joint.



Your vet will also evaluate whether closure via suturing or staples is appropriate- this can enable faster healing with reduced long-term scarring but must be carried out as soon as possible after the wound has been found to reduce infection and ensure skin is healthy to suture. Your vet will also assess the wound and decide whether antibiotics will be required to reduce the risk of secondary infection- this is especially relevant with field injuries which are often obtained on dirty wire etc. They will assess the rest of your horse to make sure that this incident has not led to other injuries such as soft tissue damage or fractures which may also require immediate treatment.

Practical Bandaging Tips

Bandaging is used for several reasons and knowing how to do it properly is important for protection, support, comfort and safety. By following a few important guidelines, you can improve your bandaging technique and ensure whenever you need to apply a bandage your horse will receive the full benefit.

- Always apply a bandage with even pressure and a 50% overlap between layers.
- Never bandage legs without padding, ideally use veterinary gamgee.
- Never restrict circulation.
- Never restrict movement especially when bandaging at the knee or hock, unless you are bandaging for immobilisation (this should be done by a vet or following instruction).
- For knee or hock wounds use a figure of eight bandage crossing at the front of the knee or hock.
- Where appropriate bandage the opposite leg to provide support.
- If bandages get wet, they can shrink and cause serious damage.

Reasons for wound bandaging

1. Protection
2. Support
3. Compression
4. Immobilisation

Points to Remember

1. The bandage must serve the purpose for which it was intended.
2. The bandage must be applied firmly, ensuring it has not been applied too tightly and circulation has not been impaired.
3. It must be as comfortable as possible for the patient.



A Good Bandage Consists of 3 Layers

1. Primary e.g., melolin, = non-adhesive dressing – to provide best environment for wound healing
2. Secondary e.g., soffban or cotton wall = absorbent dressing – to absorb fluids and conform to the limb
3. Tertiary e.g., vetrap or co-plus = cohesive bandage – to provide a protective outer layer

Remember to always keep a selection of bandages and relevant dressings in your first aid kit.

****Abbey Vets Equine First Aid kits only £24.99! available at the clinic****

