

services & information for new landholders



Do you own a small property in rural Victoria?

founder facts

This Information note describes the common horse ailment known as founder, a painful disease affecting the horse's feet.

Damage from founder may be so severe that the horse becomes permanently lame or needs to be put down.

With good management, most cases can be prevented.

The condition is particularly common in ponies on lush pasture.

Introduction

Known technically as laminitis, founder occurs when there is an inflammation of the folds of tissue connecting the pedal bone to the hoof, known as the laminae.

The damage may be so severe that the pedal bone is no longer supported within the hoof and rotates toward, and sometimes through, the sole.

Causes

The classic case of founder involves an overweight pony with a good appetite and access to

lush pasture. Access to excessive amounts of pasture, hay, grain or pellets in conjunction with lack of exercise, is the most common cause of founder.

Other known causes include blood poisoning following infection, colic, trauma to the soles of the hooves, over exercise of unfit ponies (for example, in school holidays) ingestion of large amounts of cold water and retained placenta following foaling.



Figure 1. A horse displaying a classical founder stance. (photograph courtesy C.Pawsey)

Signs of founder

Founder can occur in one or all hooves, however the front hooves are the most commonly affected. The foundered horse is reluctant to move, will shift weight from one foot to another and often leans back or lies down to relieve the pain.

Treatment

As soon as a horse is suspected of having foundered, veterinary advice or attention should be sought.

There are many treatments available.

- The most important initially is to treat the cause; often this will mean addressing the horse's diet and access to food.
- Common ongoing treatment often consists of anti-inflammatory medication and administering corrective shoeing or trimming from a farrier.
- Moving the horse to sandy or soft ground will help relieve the pain.

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- Special products which supply direct support to the sole, such as styrofoam pads or acrylic compounds over the sole may be recommended. It is important to seek specialist advice from a veterinarian before administering any treatments.

Chronic founder

Repeated episodes of founder leading to permanent changes in the feet are often referred to as 'chronic founder'.

Signs of chronic founder include:

- Rings in the hoof wall
- Widened white line between the hoof wall and sole
- Dropped soles (soles touching the ground, not concave).
- Dished hooves with abnormal growth resulting in an 'Aladdin's slipper' appearance.

Prevention

Founder can be described as killing your horse with kindness. Paying attention to the following points can help prevent founder:

- Provide a well-balanced diet.
- Restrict access to excessive feed
- Vitamin/mineral supplements and some hay should be fed even if strict feed restriction is necessary.
- Monitor and control body condition and weight. An obvious sign of weight gain is increased fat cover and a fatty neck crest.
- Reduce feed intake to reduce the risk of weight gain.
- If the risk of founder occurring or recurring is high, consider adding a founder preventative agent to the feed. Seek veterinary advice for further information.
- Regularly exercise other than riding (lunging).
- Ensure regular hoof care by a farrier.
- Consider providing a feed supplement to enhance healthy foot growth, and applying a hoof dressing (available from saddlery and produce stores).
- Avoid exposing your horse to unaccustomed pasture, hay,

grain or commercial feed pellets. Call for veterinary treatment if 'binge eating' of hard feed occurs.

- Gradually introduce any change in diet.

Original author Charles El-Hage.
Updated in 2007 by Louise Scott and
Janice Mentiplay-Smith of the New
Landholder team.

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**For more information contact the DPI
Customer Service Centre on 136 186**

Visit: www.dpi.vic.gov.au/new-landholders

Email: new.landholders@dpi.vic.gov.au