



Wounds

When first finding your horse with a wound, and often bloody, it is extremely disconcerting. The first thing to do is *not panic*. Take a few moments to assess your horse and see just how severe the wound is. Some are extremely superficial, others are much worse. Look for any active bleeding. If you find some, determine how much blood is being lost—is the wound oozing? Dripping? Squirting? Gushing? Check for swelling, not just directly around the wound on the rest of your horse. If there is a limb involved, is your horse able to walk on it? Finally, is the wound recent? When was the last time you saw your horse without the wound? Did you watch the wound occur? When you call your veterinarian, there are some of the questions we will ask you.

Many wounds are an emergency - especially if they can be sutured (stitched). We have a limited window where we can suture them and hope that they will hold together. Any wound that may involve a joint needs to be seen immediately—even if it is just a small puncture. Your horse may require antibiotics and other treatments as soon as possible.

When calling our emergency pager—remember to call the office first! You never know when we may be there. Leave a message on the machine—even if it is just your name and a number you can be reached at. Then call the pager. Punch in the number you can be reached at and press the pound (#) key. Hang up and wait for us to call you back. Do not call anybody else! It is very frustrating for us if we can't reach you when we try to call back. Additionally, if you do not hear from us in about 10 minutes then call the pager again. Sometimes numbers only come through partially, if you have not called the office, we may not have your entire number and have no way of calling you back.

Things to keep in mind about healing:

- When wounds first happen, the body will try to seal over any exposed tissue—seal the skin edges, clot over other structures
 - This is why there is a time limit for suturing
- Fibrin—this is a protein that is made by the body to promote healing. It is thick and yellow in color and does not have an odor. Horses make a lot of it and it is very normal to see with a wound. It does not mean infection if it is present. If the discharge from a wound smells bad and/or is another color besides yellow, this maybe a sign of infection and requires veterinary attention.
- Granulation tissue—this is a thick, pink, bubbly looking tissue that bleeds very easily. This is the tissue that horses make to fill in holes that are formed when a wound occurs. There are not many nerve endings in granulation tissue, so even though it bleeds readily, there is not much feeling in it.
 - “Proud flesh” - exuberant growth of granulation tissue. When granulation tissue grows above the skin edges it stops the skin from being able to continue to heal a wound. The granulation tissue then grows out of control. If it gets too large, it may require surgical removal to allow the wound to finish healing.
- Products for wound care—there are many, many products on the market, and more are being released all the time. The most important thing is to keep a wound clean. We often recommend betadine or chlorhexidine diluted for cleaning wounds. Depending on the location of the wound will change our



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recommendations for what to use. Sometimes we will recommend other creams or ointments, antibiotics or sprays. Many of the wound care products that have been used have been shown to actually slow healing, so if you have a question about a specific product, just ask!

Bandaging:

- Wounds that occur on limbs almost always require a bandage
- Against the wound itself we will recommend a dressing that is both absorbent and non-stick. We base our recommendations on the size of the wound and the amount of expected discharge. Try to avoid rolled cotton for wounds. The loose fibers stick in the wounds and it can be difficult to apply a bandage using this material
- The outer layer of the bandage is typically to hold the inner, absorbent bandage in place. You can use disposable or reusable material. Make sure when applying the bandage that you use uniform pressure and tension. It is important to make sure the bandage is neither too loose or too tight. Both of these can cause further damage to the limb (bandage bow's, etc).

Things to remember:

- While wounds can be a nerve wracking experience for the owner, often horses heal just fine. Sutures will often help a wound to heal more quickly with a more cosmetic result. Based on the wound location and severity we can help you to determine the best course of treatment for your horse.
- Many wounds are an emergency. If you are not sure, always call. Often people send us pictures of wounds so that we can help you decide if we need to see your horse.
- Depending on the severity of the wound, immediate treatment with antibiotics or other therapies maybe required.
- When bandaging leg wounds, use care that the bandage is applied correctly with sufficient padding.

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