



Horse Care Info Sheet

Watch for Wounds: Five Things Not To Do

When a horse is injured, it can be a very scary time for owners and handlers, especially if there is blood involved. However, it is important to remain calm when dealing with wounds. Here are five things you should not do when your horse is injured:

1. **DO NOT apply any ointments, sprays or powders** to a wound that will be treated by a veterinarian. While it can be tempting to dress the injury immediately, it is important that the veterinarian examines an untreated wound. If you apply an ointment, powder or spray before your vet arrives, it will likely need to be removed for the examination. In some cases ointments, sprays and powders may slow the healing process, so it is important to wait for your vet's directions. If the horse is bleeding profusely, you can press a clean towel against the wound to help stop the bleeding.
2. **DO NOT rush to give your horse pain medication**, such as "bute" (phenylbutazone). While the drugs will offer some pain relief, they may also mask a larger issue. For example, a horse with a cut and minor swelling might also have a hairline fracture – if the pain of the fracture is masked, it may go unnoticed and the horse may damage itself further.
3. **DO NOT remove any protruding objects from the wound.** Removing the object can cause more damage. Wait for your veterinarian! They will perform x-rays to determine how deep the object is and how to best remove it.
4. **DO NOT let the wound go unattended.** It is important to promptly treat the wound and then to carefully monitor the healing process. Wounds must be treated daily to ensure cleanliness, stop infection and to prevent the excessive growth of granulation tissue (commonly known as proud flesh). Even the smallest wound can result in a serious infection (such as tetanus), so examine all wounds, no matter how minor they may seem.
5. **DO NOT wait to call a veterinarian.** If you are unsure if the wound needs professional attention, do not hesitate to call your vet. It is better to be safe than sorry! Wounds should be addressed by a veterinarian within six hours. The longer you wait, the more difficult it may be for the vet to repair the wound. If it is an eye injury, call your vet immediately.

IMPORTANT: Make sure your horse has an annual tetanus booster. All horses are exquisitely sensitive to tetanus and this is compounded by their environment where the organism is common. Walking your paddock fence line on a regular basis is an important habit for spotting potential hazards before they cause injury but even the most vigilant horse owner will have to treat wounds as they are not uncommon among equids.

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Learn more about wound care, enroll in Equine Guelph's [Equine Health & Disease Prevention](#) 12 week course, or our [Equine First Aid](#) short course on The Horse Portal!



Photo: Kathleen Kocmarek

This horse has a laceration above the knee.