

DISCUSSION - 01

A QUICK INTRO TO NATURAL HOOF CARE

Article Series Discussing Natural Hoof & Horse Care by Denys Antonenko

What is NHC?

Natural hoof care (NHC) is a method of trimming and caring for horses and their hooves. It is not like the typical shoeing methods we see in the farrier industry. NHC focuses on rehabilitating not only the hoof but the whole horse to have peak performance while being barefoot!

Can my horse go barefoot?

Although many people believe that domestic horses can't perform and live without metal shoes there's proof that they are capable of having rock-crunching barefoot hooves! Many domestic horses can benefit from being barefoot.

How does it work?

When trimming, we mimic the wear patterns of wild mustangs: a perfect example of the healthiest equine hooves there could be! By mimicking the natural wear patterns of mustangs we can accomplish growing a healthy hoof on a domestic horse!



Shod VS Bare

There is a constant debate whether horses should be in shoes or not. When discussing this topic we need to rely on the facts given to us through scientific research. Based on the research and studies done by Dr. Robert Bowker, VMD, PhD, the hoof is responsible for dissipating energy when being in contact with the ground while the horse is in motion (walking, trotting, galloping). When we nail a metal shoe to a hoof, the shock absorption characteristics of a hoof fade away. The hoof is lifted off the ground by the shoe and the internal tissues of the hoof are not being stimulated... and when muscles or tissues are not stimulated they get atrophied.





We are what we eat

This phrase is relevant not only to humans but to our animals, including horses. How can we expect to grow a healthy and functional hoof if we're feeding horses diets that are high in calories and carbohydrates? As Hoof Care Specialist Pete Ramey once said: "Its like living in a pie factory for us!"

To grow a healthy hoof we must:

- Correct the diet so that the horse has as little carbohydrate intake as possible (NRC or National Research Center suggests starch less than 4% and combined sugar+starch less than 10%)
- Have the hooves trimmed often (4-5 weeks) especially when we're rehabbing the horse from a serious hoof pathology.
- Provide the horse with a lot of movement. Movement = rehab.

Study the lifestyle of the wild mustangs. Their hooves are healthy because: 1)they're not eating lush grass pastures/sugar, 2)they move many miles every single day, 3)their hooves are getting self-trimmed from all the movement and rough terrain.

Is there a way to grow a healthy hoof?

First off, let's think pure logic... to make our muscles functional and healthy we must eat healthy and exercise. Same thing applies to the whole horse, including their hooves. For the internal tissues to develop and adapt to every kind of terrain we need to stimulate them. When the horse is barefoot we trim it in a way so that all structures of the hoof are taking part in weight loading. In metal shoes, the primary thing that is loaded is the periphery of the hoof wall (or the outer edge of the walls). As was stated, this creates a significant amount of problems because the tissues are not being stimulated and developed.

We can start expecting a healthy hoof growth if the horse is properly loading the foot without any compensation (pain) and is developing the internal structures by moving (and not standing in a stall all day). Wild mustangs are constantly on the move. Their diet is well balanced and doesn't cause any type of inflammation, part of the reason is that they're not eating lush, sugar-filled grass like our domestic horses. By making changes to benefit our horses, we reveal the secret to "perfect" and sound hooves!

