

Heel First Landing *con't from pg 17*

Making sure the diet is reasonably natural can also help stem fungal infections. Excess sugars (from grass, palletized feeds molasses, etc.), can make the horse's tissue more friendly to invaders. Although navicular is not as connected to diet as some diseases like founder, the systems of the horse are interconnected, and a healthy diet will positively impact the feet.

• Encourage the development of the structures of the back of the foot.

This is best done with pads and boots while under saddle (see above), and through providing a variety of terrain while the horse is turned out. The horse should be provided adequate space to move in while he is not being ridden. Giving him an area with a bed of pea gravel 2 inches thick will help stimulate and support the back of his feet. He should also have the opportunity to stand in other textures too—mud (if the fungal infections are under control), hard packed dirt, sand, rocks, etc. He will choose what feels good to stand on and will recondition his feet at his own pace.

It takes around 5 years to fully develop the digital cushions and lateral cartilages from start to finish. Be patient—your horse will

probably have no idea anything is wrong with him long before that. Meanwhile you will be able to enjoy outward signs of the fruits of your labor—decontracting heels, denser frogs, shorter tougher heel buttresses, and of course, greater soundness for your horse.

What NOT To Do For Your Navicular Horse

There are certain things that are commonly done to navicular horses either because they are popular and because the owner is unaware they are bad. Here are some common traps to avoid.

- Wedges are often used on horses with navicular disease, because lifting the heel off the ground brings temporary pain relief. The problem with this is two fold: 1. The wedge prevents the foot from landing heel first RELATIVE TO THE COFFIN BONE, even if the back of the prosthetically modified foot touches down first and 2. The structures of the back of the foot are taken even further out of function, and without the proper stimulation they continue to weaken making the back of the foot prone to pain.

- Heart bar and egg bar shoes are often applied (sometimes with pads) because the thought is

that they will stimulate the frog by placing pressure on it. These measures will stimulate the frog—one step worth. Effective stimulation only occurs with pressure AND release.

- For that matter, don't use any shoes at all. Research now indicates that the use of affixed shoes causes a cessation of the development of the digital cushions and lateral cartilages. The same lab (Dr. Robert Bowker at the University of Michigan) has also found a correlation between underdeveloped digital cushions and lateral cartilages and navicular in a comparative study of pleasure horses euthanized for navicular and horses euthanized for other reasons. In addition the peripheral loading of the shoe places additional stress on the hoof wall (in the back as well as front, changes the shock absorption properties of the foot, and raises the frog out of function.

- Do not keep the horse on stall rest. He needs plenty of healthy movement at his own pace to help restore his hoof function. Hand walking for 10 minutes a day or (mercy forbid!) strapping him to a hot walker will not be enough. Turning him out with a buddy to help encourage movement is a much better option.

- Do not have your horse nerved! It is unnecessary, and will make him more prone to stumble. The surgery often has to be repeated after several years, and carries the risk of side

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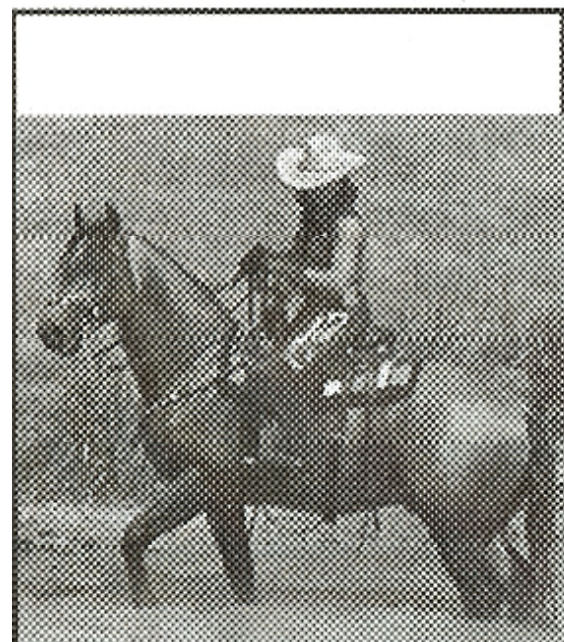
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