

# TEN TIPS FOR BETTER HOOVES

“No hoof, no horse.” There’s no truer saying in the horse world. Healthy hooves are the foundation for every activity you want to enjoy with your horse. Devoting a few extra minutes to hoof care each time you groom your horse will help ensure the health of his hooves and will make you more aware if a problem arises. Here are ten relatively simple hoof care tips.

## 1) PICK OUT YOUR HORSE’S FEET.

Sounds pretty basic, but it’s the single most important thing you can do for your horse’s hooves. Surprisingly, a lot of horse owners think that the only time a horse’s hooves need to be picked out is when the farrier visits. Regularly picking out your horse’s hooves will give you an early heads up on problems such as bruises, cracks, abscesses, punctures, and thrush.

## 2) ESTABLISH WHAT’S NORMAL FOR YOUR HORSE.

Handle your horse’s feet and take note of their temperature. Then, take a moment to locate the digital pulse by pressing two fingers against the back of his pastern; you’re more interested in the strength of the pulse under normal conditions rather than the rate. Look at and feel the frog, in a healthy hoof it should have the texture and firmness of a new rubber eraser. Becoming familiar with your horse’s hooves under normal conditions will help you catch any problems that may arise.

## 3) SCHEDULE REGULAR FARRIER VISITS ACCORDING TO YOUR HORSE’S INDIVIDUAL NEEDS.

Although six to eight weeks is the average, there’s really no standard interval for trimming and shoeing. If your farrier is in the process of correcting a problem such as contracted heels or flare in the hoof, your horse might benefit from a shorter interval. If your horse starts forging (striking the back of a front hoof with the toe of a back hoof) in the last few days before the next farrier visit, you may want to think about shortening the interval between shoeings.

## 4) IF YOUR HORSE IS SHOD, CHECK HIS SHOES REGULARLY.

Check for risen clinches and shifted or sprung shoes. Risen clinches are a sign the shoe is loosening and your horse can injure himself if the risen clinches on one foot brush the inside of the opposite leg. If a shoe is shifted or sprung its nails may be pressing on sensitive hoof structures when your horse puts weight on the foot.

## 5) LEARN HOW TO REMOVE A SHOE.

If you can remove a sprung or shifted shoe, you may save your horse unnecessary pain and hoof damage. Many farriers are glad to teach clients how to do this.

## 6) PROTECT YOUR HORSE’S HOOVES DURING HAULING.

If his heels are exposed, he can easily step on the edge of a shoe and pull it partially loose. He’ll then spend the remainder of the trip standing on the nails of the sprung or shifted shoe. You’ll also want to cover the coronet band. Injury to this area can interrupt hoof growth.

## 7) EXERCISE YOUR HORSE.

Consistency is key. Work on good surfaces. Exercise increases circulation to your horse’s hooves and promotes growth.

## 8) AVOID MUDDY TURN-OUT LOTS.

Prolonged exposure to mud may encourage thrush or scratches (a skin infection in the fetlock area that can cause lameness). Also, the suction of deep mud can drag off a shoe.

## 9) AVOID WET-DRY FLUCTUATIONS.

A horse’s hooves can adapt well over time to conditions that are consistently dry or consistently damp, but they suffer when the environment fluctuates between wet and dry. Hooves swell and soften in wet conditions and contract in dry conditions. With repetition of this cycle, horseshoe nails loosen as their holes in the hoof wall expand. Stomping flies or walking the fence row accelerates the loosening and pretty soon your horse is without shoes.

## 10) FEED FOR GOOD HOOVES.

Consult your veterinarian to make sure your feeding program is meeting your horse’s nutritional needs. Consider adding a biotin supplement to his ration.

—SARAH GEE

### References

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A Guide to Proper Care and Nutrition for the Equine Hoof at [www.windandwithers.com/articles/equine-hoof.htm](http://www.windandwithers.com/articles/equine-hoof.htm)