

## COMMITMENT!

**To achieve the goal of having a sound barefoot horse capable of being ridden on any terrain requires commitment.**

Not only is regular correct trimming at recommended intervals an absolute must, but the horse must also have as natural a lifestyle as possible.

Those requirements are:

**Turnout.** As much as possible! The best is 24/7, but it's not always achievable we know. Still more is definitely better.

**Healthy Diet.** The best is free choice grass hay. But beware of hays like Orchard Grass which are rich in sugar. Limit sugars as much as possible. Sugar has a proven negative effect on hoof growth and too much can cause laminitis.

**Exercise.** The more exercise the better! Movement is essential for healthy hooves. We cannot emphasize too much how vital real movement is to the horse's health. Horses were never intended to be couch potatoes. Just as we suffer from not getting enough exercise, so do horses. Horses are not only healthier when they get lots of exercise, they are happier.

**Friends/Companions.** Although not directly related to hoof health, having the company of other horses greatly contributes to a horse's overall health. Horses are truly only happy when allowed to live with other horses.

With commitment there are few horses who cannot successfully become barefoot performance horses!!!!

### For More Information

#### Websites

[www.hoofrehab.com](http://www.hoofrehab.com)  
[www.ironfreehoof.com](http://www.ironfreehoof.com)  
[www.healthyhoof.com](http://www.healthyhoof.com)  
[www.barefoothorse.com](http://www.barefoothorse.com)

#### Books

Making Natural Hoofcare Work for You  
by Pete Ramey

The Horse Owner's Guide to Natural Hoofcare  
by Jaime Jackson

The Chosen Road  
by K.C. La Pierre

#### Videos

Natural Balance Hoof Trimming  
by Gene Ovnicek

Essential Hoof Care  
by Gene Ovnicek

How to Trim a Laminitic Hoof  
by Jaime Jackson

Eliminating Flares, Splits, & Run-under Heels  
by Jaime Jackson

The Chosen Road Video Series  
by K.C. La Pierre

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## Natural Barefoot Trimming Common Questions



Before

After second trim. Note that the hoof wall has NOT been rasped to remove the flare. Changes have been the result of correct trim stimulating healthy growth.



### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A NATURAL BAREFOOT TRIM?

“No foot no horse” is a very true statement. Pain-free, well functioning feet lead to better gaits and performance. With the proper barefoot trim horses can not only fulfill their potential, they can actually live longer, healthier lives. A great many problems which appear to be from aging are actually caused by poor hoof health. Conditions such as navicular are not only curable by going barefoot, but will most likely never occur if the barefoot lifestyle is started early.

In addition to the effects on the horse's health, some of the other benefits of going barefoot include:

- There are no shoes to lose!
- Injuries from kicks are minimized
- The natural foot has better traction than steel
- Hoof care cost is reduced!

There is too much information on the healthy functioning of the foot and the benefits of barefoot to list here, so we have listed several resources where you can find more detailed information.

## WHAT IS A BAREFOOT TRIM?

To put it very simply - a natural barefoot trim is meant to 1) *simulate* the wear horses' feet would get if they were free to get all the exercise they needed to keep their feet self-trimmed; and 2) *stimulate* the hoof to grow healthy and in the proper form for each individual horse.

A good trim helps the foot to help itself while never trying to impose any specific "ideal". On the contrary, the trimmer's job is to read each foot to determine what it's trying to say.



Healthy bare hoof on a TB mare who's sound on any terrain.

## IS A NATURAL BAREFOOT TRIM DIFFERENT THAN JUST LEAVING MY HORSE BAREFOOT, OR HAVING A NORMAL FARRIER TRIM?

**Absolutely!** Just removing the shoes is not a "natural trim". The exception would be if your horse lives on terrain and gets exercise sufficient to self-trim. However, although some do, most horses do not get enough exercise to wear their feet sufficiently to give them the short, tight feet they would have in the wild.

The hoof wall grows continually. If growth exceeds wear then the hoof capsule starts to deform. Our goal is to keep the feet at the optimal length for each horse. ***There is no perfect length.***

In addition to keeping the length under control, we also use a "mustang roll" to keep the toes from running away (the most common hoof deformity and the cause of most under run heels) and the breakover where it belongs.

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD MY HORSE BE TRIMMED?

The optimal trim interval is 4 weeks. In some cases, due to hoof problems, more frequent trimming may be necessary. After several trims the feet may begin to self regulate. That means that the growth will start to balance with the wear. When this happens many horses can go 5 to 6 weeks between trims, or even longer, depending on the terrain they live on and the amount of exercise they get.

**"My horse normally goes 8 weeks (or more) between shoeing/trims. Why should he be trimmed more often?"**

The goal in natural trimming is to encourage and maintain hoof health, Constant variation in hoof length defeats the purpose of a good natural trim. Basically, if the horse is not trimmed often enough the hoof is always in some stage of deformity and never achieves optimum form. Regular, frequent trimming is necessary to correct and maintain proper hoof form.

## WHY IS MY HORSE OUCHY ON ROCKS AND GRAVEL?

Ouchiness is a sign the internal structures of the foot are not healthy. Most frequently these horses have heel pain, the origin of which is the digital cushion. Years of shoeing can cause the digital cushion to lose mass and become weak. When



An all too common sight

**"I tried to go barefoot but my horse was ouchy. He was fine as soon as his shoes were put back on. Doesn't that mean he needs shoes?"**

that happens, as the horse puts weight on the back part of the foot, there is not enough support and they will feel pain. This is similar to you walking barefoot on gravel when you don't normally do it.

What it means is that your horse is not sound and damage is occurring inside the foot. The reason shoes *appear* - and the key word is APPEAR - to make the horse go sound the minute they're put on is simple; the shoe prevents the full weight of the horse from coming down on the digital cushion - so he doesn't feel pain when shod. The digital cushion is still unhealthy, and eventually this will result in the horse being off even with shoes on. The diagnosis will most likely be "navicular syndrome".

As the leg is loaded, inside the hoof the coffin bone descends and presses on the digital cushion. That action presses down on the frog and the back of the hoof actually spreads outward under the weight. As the hoof comes off the ground, the weight is relieved and the hoof contracts. That action - in a barefoot horse - is what keeps the digital cushion tough and healthy. In a shod horse, due to the strength and rigidity of the shoe, when the horse's leg is loaded during motion, the hoof cannot spread and the digital cushion never bears the amount of weight it should. Since in nature the rule is "use it or lose it" the digital cushion begins to lose mass and become weak



Healthy beautiful hoof

Now, if you take the shoes off, the horse's foot can function normally again. But since the digital cushion has shrunk, it doesn't offer the thick pad of support it should. When the horse's weight comes down on it, he feels pain in varying degrees - depending on much it has deteriorated.

The good news is that the digital cushion can rehabilitate and become healthy.

**"How long will it take for the digital cushion to rehabilitate?"**

It depends. There is no hard and fast rule. It depends on the individual horse, on how weak the digital cushion is, and on how much exercise the horse gets. The more the better. But keep the horse comfortable. While the digital cushion is weak ride in boots when the terrain warrants it.