

Contemporary Hoof Protection.

Swedish Hoof School

The modern definition of barefoot is that you let your horse sleep barefoot and give the horse exactly the hoof protection it needs at every specific time. The horse doesn't need any hoof protection when it is idle in the box and sound horses don't need any hoof protection when they are in the paddock. Usually that is about 98% of the time for an average domestic horse. On stony gravel roads and on asphalt many domestic horses need hoof protection because of lack of practice. The horse optimizes its hoof to the life it is living. A horse that lives in the paddock optimizes its hoof for paddock life and they will work just fine



Shoes that might be good for a special purpose but who needs them to sleep good?

for that. A horse that lives on gravel roads will not have any problems what so ever with performing on gravel roads.

Not giving the horse the hoof protection it needs is just as bad as forcing it to wear hoof protection it doesn't need. The hoof is initially intended for use on surfaces that are soft enough for food to grow on. That kind of surface will fill the hoof from below and distribute the forces evenly over the entire bottom of the hoof.

No kind of hoof protection is as good for the evolution and strengthening of the hoof as being bare but hoof protection can be necessary to protect the hoof from soreness and extensive wear. When you choose hoof protection for your horse you should choose one that doesn't restrict the hoof and alters the distribution of the forces as little as possible from the natural condition.

It is perfectly natural for all horses to be able to walk barefooted on all natural surfaces. Foals always can and they should be able to continue doing so for the rest of their lives if they live a natural life. If a horse, after a time of domestication, can't move flawlessly on all surfaces anymore we have made that horse sick.

I want to point out that it is easy to confuse the lack of visible symptoms with soundness. Of course that is not the case. A hoof protection can never make the horse sound by it self. The only thing that can make the horse sound again is the horse itself. No man can create a healthy hoof. We can only help the horse by not opposing the healing powers of nature, which mainly comes from blood circulation.

Using hoof protection that decreases the blood circulation can never be the best solution and using hoof protection that only covers up the symptoms so that we can continue using the sick horse just for our joy can not be considered humane.

Signs of poor blood circulation are:

- poor quality of the horn
- thin hoof walls
- poor growth
- poor power of resistance to wounds and disease
- soreness and sensitivity
- thrush
- White line disease
- cold hooves

- stumbling, brushing, interfering, forging, overreaching, scalping, knee-hitting, elbow hitting, crossfiring and speedy-cutting are often a sign of poor sensitivity caused by poor blood circulation. A horse that hurts it self recurrently with a hoof on another body part does that because that hoof has reduced sensitivity.

If your horse is suffering from any of these problems you are probably using the wrong kind of hoof protection.

Today you can find numerous different kinds of hoof boots in different styles and colors even though the evolution of hoof boots just has started. The producers have much more of special boots for special purposes in the pipeline. They are still not perfect for the hoof but since they only should be used when they are needed, which is while riding on rough grounds (1-2% of the total time) and they allow the horse to be without a restricting hoof protection when there is no need for one they are a much better choice than old fashion permanent hoof protection nailed to the hoof.

Ove Lind
Swedish Hoof School Inc.
www.SwedishHoofSchool.com