

# Ask A Vet: High Ringbone - A Common Lameness Problem in Horses

*Sunday, May 4, 2014*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

My trail horse is 14 years old and has recently developed high ringbone. Is this something that can be successfully treated and what is the long term outlook for soundness?

Dear Reader,

High ringbone is arthritis of the pastern joint of the horse. The pastern joint only has a 7 degree movement but when it gets degenerative joint disease that slight movement becomes quite painful to the horse. This joint is a high load - low motion joint and does not respond to intra-auricular injections so treatment can be difficult. Radiographs and ultrasound are useful in confirming the diagnosis and the severity of the arthritic damage. Often new bony growth forms along the front and sides of the pastern and sometimes can be seen or felt during the lameness exam.

Horses that exert on their lower limbs during sudden stopping and turning are more prone to developing high ringbone. Performance horses can do remarkably well without that 7 degree movement of the pastern joint so high ringbone is one arthritic condition that can be resolved completely by fusing the pastern joint either surgically or allowing time and the bony deposits to gradually fuse the joint. This gradual fusing can take up to a year and surgically the joint can be fused in a matter of weeks with the horse in a cast and box stalled to allow arthrodesis to occur.

Anti-inflammatory treatment with phenylbutazone (bute) can be used to decrease inflammation and for long term management while the joint is naturally fusing. Corrective shoeing to ease the break over of the foot decreases the torque on the pastern and can make a big difference in management of high ringbone. Keeping the toe short and rolling the shoe to aid break over often provides great relief to the horse.

Newer therapy like shock wave treatment is also promising and relieves the arthritic pain while the joint is fusing. Another means of treatment of high ringbone involves the injection of alcohol into the pastern joint to speed up the fusing process. Surgically drilling out the joint surfaces and casting the foot to allow it to heal like a broken bone returns many horses to athletic use in a matter of a few months. Sometimes a combination of bone screws and plates are used to immobilize the joint.

As you can see there are various options for treatment depending on the use of the horse, the time needed for resolution of the lameness, the severity of the lameness, and the costs of therapy. Your veterinarian can help you determine the best treatment for your horse and your farrier can be a big help in keeping your high ringbone horse on the trail and sound to ride.

-Dr. Jerry Sellon