

Ask A Vet: No Hoof- No Horse

Sunday, July 24, 2016

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

We are looking to purchase a horse for our daughter later this year, and have much to learn before doing so. Some of our horsey friends have mentioned the necessity of finding a good farrier. What is that and why are they so important?

Dear Soon to be Horse Parents,

Great job in doing your research before purchasing a new pet; caring for a horse can be very rewarding and you need to be prepared to care for them for 30 years or more. Farriers (or blacksmiths) are horse foot professionals who are responsible for shaping, trimming, and balancing horse feet; as well as shoeing and correcting certain lamenesses. Farrier training often involves 1-2 years of training in a trade school followed by 6 months to 2 years of apprentice work under a certified farrier. You need to find a good farrier that you trust to help keep your horse's feet well shaped and balanced, and to work with your veterinarian when/if the need arises to deal with a major medical issue. Most horses require hoof trimming every 6-8 weeks, but that time can vary depending on the overall quality of your horse's feet and your style of riding. For advice on where to find a good farrier, check with any of your horse friends, your veterinarian's office, or places like <https://americanfarriers.org>.

Caring for a horse's feet is vital. There is an old adage of, "No Hoof, No Horse". While it is important to have your horse's feet evaluated and trimmed every 6-8 weeks, there is much that needs to be done by the horse-owner frequently. Examine your horse's feet every day or at least every time you ride or work your horse. Talk about normal foot anatomy with your farrier or veterinarian, and look up any of the terms you are unfamiliar with. Starting with the outer area of the foot, examine the coronary band for any areas of discoloration, swelling, or soreness. Check the outer hoof capsule for cracks or bulging areas. If wearing shoes, make sure that the nails are still seated well and the shoe is straight. Then pick up each foot and use a hoof pick and brush to remove any dirt and debris from the foot. Make sure to pay attention to the grooves on either side of the frog. Check for any nails, rocks, or other foreign objects that the horse could have stepped on. If an object is penetrating the bottom of the foot, call your veterinarian or farrier immediately. After cleaning the debris, monitor the sole for areas of bruising or bulging. Make sure that the hoof rim is intact or that the shoe is seated properly.

As usual, contact your veterinarian if you have any questions.

-Dr. Jason Heitzman