

EQUUS EXTRA

VOLUME 76



GETTY IMAGES

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:



WINTER CARE FOR OLDER HORSES

- Feeding for warmth and health
- Sensible blanketing
- Winter hoof care

MORE FLEX PER SCOOP GUARANTEED

Compared to the leading competitor.



WHAT'S IN THOSE PELLETS?

FLEX means a more powerful combination of key ingredients for comprehensive joint, cartilage and inflammation care. **MAX** means more nutrients per scoop and better bioavailability so all that good stuff ends up where it's needed and not in your horse's bedding. Plus, there's no loading dose so your horse gets maximum joint health support every day - from the very first scoop.

Take joint health to the max. + FlexPlusMax.com





The best winter care for aging horses

Here are **10 ways** to keep older horses happy and healthy through the cold weather season and into spring.



By Christine Barakat/Photos from Getty Images

Horses, like people, tend to have more trouble handling cold weather as they grow older. Snow, sub-freezing temperatures and frozen footing may keep an elderly horse from doing even the simplest things, such as walking to the water trough. It's not uncommon for horses in their 20s or beyond to have difficulty holding their weight, staying warm and/or moving around during the winter.

To keep older horses comfortable and healthy through the season, David Trachtenberg, DVM, owner of Ledgewood Veterinary Equine Clinic in Ontario, New York, recommends focusing on the two areas of winter management that can have the biggest influence on the health of older horses—feeding and blanketing.

1. Feed for warmth

In cold weather, horses utilize feed to stay warm over both the short and long term. Within minutes of

eating a meal, the horse's digestive processes start to generate body heat. And over the long term, the calories not immediately converted to energy that supports bodily processes are stored as fat, which helps to insulate against the cold.

Forage, such as hay, is metabolized more slowly than grain—in fact, because hay has a longer “burn time,” it ultimately produces more heat.

“Feeding hay—lots of it—will go a long, long way to keeping a horse of any age warm,” says Trachtenberg. “A horse who has access to hay all night long is going to be much more comfortable than one that gets only a flake or two that's gone by dark.”

As a result, it's wise to increase your aging horse's feed ration during the winter. “People tend to underestimate the amount of food that older horses require in winter,” says Trachtenberg. “They may not appreciate how much nutrition their horse gets from the pasture in the warm months



and do not give them enough hay to make up the difference. So, in reality, they are feeding less.”

If older horses don't take in enough calories, they can get caught in a self-perpetuating weight-loss cycle in the winter, Trachtenberg says. “Older horses tend to be thinner, with less muscle and fat layers. The feed these horses eat goes toward creating these insulating layers and keeping them warm. If they cannot maintain body weight they become colder and use more energy to stay warm, which in turn makes them even thinner.”

Additionally, when the majority of a horse's nutrients go to keeping him warm, he has fewer resources left for fighting off illness or repairing tissues, leading to a decline in overall health.

Compounding the problem is the

fact that older horses don't digest food nearly as efficiently as younger horses do, says Trachtenberg. “Specifically, their ability to digest fiber is 5 percent lower and their ability to utilize protein is about 15 percent lower. So even if they are being fed the same amount of feed as the younger horses, older horses will not utilize it all and can lose condition quickly.”

2. Make sure your older horse is in good condition before cold weather sets in.

Try to send an older horse into winter with a body condition score of at least 5, which means his ribs are not visible but can be felt, his withers are rounded, the fat around his tail head is slightly spongy and his shoulder blends smoothly into his body. But

don't overdo weight gain: You don't want to send a horse into winter with too much extra body fat. “Older joints don't need to be carrying extra weight any time of year,” says Trachtenberg, “but in winter it can be particularly problematic because the horse is also likely to be more inactive, which isn't good for joints either.”

3. Increase the amount of hay you provide your older horse.

Increase a horse's forage intake during the winter months, getting as close to the ideal of around-the-clock, free-choice hay as possible. “If an older horse with dental issues can't chew hay properly, you can buy a chopped hay product—it will accomplish the same thing,” says Trachtenberg.

4. Pay special attention to your hay's quality.

Of course, it's always important to feed the best quality hay that you can find. But it's especially important in winter. Fibrous, stemmy hay is not digested well by horses of any age, making it essentially useless in helping a horse gain body condition or stay warm.

5. Keep an eye on your older horse's weight.

Monitor an older horse's weight all season long, making adjustments when necessary. If needed, add calories as fat instead of sugars or carbohydrates, both of which can aggravate metabolic conditions of older horses.



Preseason tune-up

Ideally, winter care for older horses begins in fall, says David Trachtenberg, DVM. "I'd like to see an older horse before the weather gets cold to ensure he has enough weight on him and is in good physical condition. If an older horse goes into the winter with problems that aren't identified or addressed, the situation is only going to get worse."

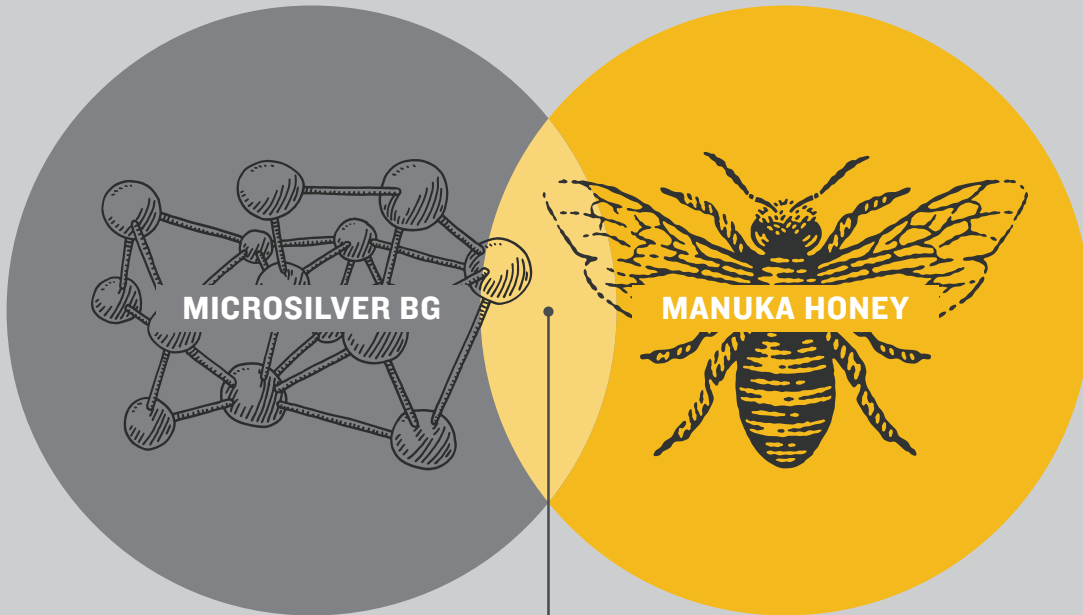
6. Go easy on his lungs.

Even if a horse doesn't have respiratory diseases, extremely cold air, inhaled deeply, can irritate lung tissue. Turnout in a stable herd is fine, but avoid asking an older horse with heaves to exert himself in very cold weather.

7. Make sure he has decent footing.

Poor mobility: Horses with arthritis, chronic laminitis or neurological disease may find it difficult to negotiate frozen terrain. Snow, ice and even frozen mud can be hazardous. Pay close attention to what is underfoot each day and keep older horses in areas with the best traction.





COMING TOGETHER TO HEAL WOUNDS **FASTER**

Silver Honey® is the first and only product line to use the unique combination of natural, medical-grade **Manuka Honey** and **MicroSilver BG™** to kill 99.9% of bacteria immediately so you can start healing your horse's wounds and skin conditions faster.



DISCOVER THE SCIENCE AT SILVERHONEY.COM

©2022 W.F. YOUNG, INC.



8. Support your older horse's joint health.

If you've got arthritis yourself, you may have noticed that cold weather seems to increase your aches and pains. Research has yet to explain why, but it's safe to assume something similar occurs in horses. So do what you can to protect your horse's joints. Consider adding a joint-support supplement to your horse's feed regimen. Anti-inflammatory medications may help, too. And keep your horse as active as possible through winter. If turnout isn't practical, ride or hand-walk him daily.

9. Make allowances for his aging eyes.

The glare from sun-light bouncing off snow can make it difficult for horses with even minor cataracts to see. Consider outfitting these horses with dark fly masks, which will act as sunglasses.

The glare from sun-light bouncing off snow can make it difficult for horses with even minor cataracts to see.

10. Keep him warm with a blanket if necessary

Although a full winter coat will protect most horses well enough in sub-zero temperatures, blankets can be an integral part of maintaining an older horse's health during the winter.

"An older horse, even a perfectly healthy one, is going to have a harder time staying warm in very cold weather," says Trachtenberg. "They tend to have less muscle mass and fat to act as insulation." A cold horse not only

becomes thin, but he will also become stressed and weak as his body struggles to maintain its temperature. That can lead to a compromised immune system less able to fight off illness or infection.

As a general rule, Trachtenberg recommends blanketing any horse older than 20 when temperatures drop below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. "That doesn't mean you should feel guilty about not blanketing a 21-year-old who is in great shape," he says. "If that horse has shelter and is maintaining his weight and seems healthy, he probably doesn't need a blanket. But with the older horses in colder climates, it's better to start from the assumption that they need a blanket rather than the other way around."

For horses on the cusp of old age, the decision to blanket needs to be made based on a number of factors. "A 17-year-old horse with a body condition of 4, for instance, may need blanketing while his 23-year-old pasturemate in good shape doesn't. Horses with poor dental health may also need a blanket



because they are unable to properly chew and digest hay for warmth,” says Trachtenberg. Arthritis and other lameness issues can make it harder for an aged horse to keep warm—sound horses can generate heat by moving around, but a sore horse may not.

And pay attention to more than simply the ambient temperatures: “A horse will be much colder in 38 wet, windy, sleety degrees than in 20 degrees with an insulating layer of dry snow on his back,” says Trachtenberg. In addition, he says, it’s wise to invest in a couple of blankets of different weights: “That will give you the freedom to blanket on the relatively warmer days without the worry of overheating the horse. A horse that is kept too warm under a blanket will begin to sweat, and that can quickly lead to dangerous chills.”

If you’re unsure about blanketing, watch your horse for signs that he’s cold. The most immediate and obvious is shivering, says Trachtenberg: “It

If you’re unsure about blanketing, watch your horse for signs that he’s cold. The most obvious is shivering.

revers a horse’s metabolism and burns calories. The horse stays warm, but not for long and at an extremely high cost. An older horse can shiver an alarming amount of weight off in a short period of time.”

No one style or type of blanket is best for older horses, but a good fit is critical. “I’ve treated some older horses who got tangled up in blanket straps that were too long,” says Trachtenberg. “A younger horse will just rip the blanket to shreds to free himself, but an older horse may not have the strength to fight his way out.

Be extra careful when fitting.”

Finally, it’s very important to take your horse’s blanket off regularly. “A lot of problems can go unseen under a winter blanket, especially weight loss. Older horses may not have a cushioning layer of fat over points like the withers, shoulders or hips and can develop pressure sores. Older horses with Cushing’s can also be prone to bacterial and fungal skin infections. You’ve really got to take the blanket off each day and take a look at what’s going on underneath it,” says Trachtenberg.

Owners of geriatric horses often talk about getting their beloved animals through “one more winter,” and with good reason. This time of year can be the harshest for the oldest members of the herd. With attentive feeding and blanketing, however, you can lessen the worst of the wintertime burdens for older horses to have them greet spring in good health. ●

DON'T LET THIS RIDE STOP THE NEXT

Keep your horse comfortable and ready to ride with Magic Cushion®.

You can't always control the footing, but you can help undo its impact. Proven to reduce heat and calm inflammation, Magic Cushion® hoof packing provides fast-acting, long-lasting relief to hooves and legs. So your horse recovers from this ride in time for the next.

Save on Magic Cushion® at Absorbine.com.

©2019 W.F. Young, Inc.





Winter HOOF CARE

By Christine Barakat

With the change of the season come some challenges in caring for your horse's hooves. Here are answers to some of the most common cold weather-related hoof questions.

In the depths of winter, certain aspects of your horse's health and care demand your immediate attention: Is he warm enough? Is his water bucket iced over? Is he holding his weight? As you focus on these pressing questions, it can be easy to overlook season-specific tasks related to hoof management. But your horse's feet are subject to some particular stressors during the cold-weather months, and if you don't address them you may find yourself looking at a compromised hoof and wondering what exactly went wrong.

The following questions represent some of the hoof-care challenges that commonly arise during the winter, and the answers provide information on managing or preventing those problems so your horse stays sound and is ready for spring.



SLOW GROWTH

► *For the past several months, my horse had been growing out a short, horizontal crack in his right front hoof. Over the summer and fall, the crack moved quickly toward the ground, but now it seems to have stopped entirely. What's going on?*

You have noticed a winter reality: The rate of hoof growth tends to slow at this time of year. New hoof wall emerges from the coronary band, growing down toward the toe, so defects—assuming the underlying issue is

resolved—will move in that direction. A defect, such as the horizontal crack you describe, is a marker that reveals the rate of hoof growth.

It takes about a year for a horse to grow a new hoof, but the progress is not steady. Growth is much faster in the spring and summer months than in the winter. Several factors contribute to a slower growth rate in the cold weather months, including decreased circulation associated with less activity and fewer nutritional resources because of the lack of fresh pasture.



There's no need to limit turnout when pastures are **frozen**. In a friendly herd, your horse will adopt a comfortable and safe activity level on his own.

Slower hoof growth may mean you can stretch time between farrier visits for another week or two during the winter, assuming your horse is sound with well-balanced hooves and no ongoing issues. But, as you've noticed, it also means it will take more time for problems to be resolved.

The best way to encourage hoof growth in winter is to increase your horse's activity with more turnout or riding time. This will encourage circulation, which promotes growth and overall health. Feed supplements containing biotin will improve the quality of the hoof growth but won't affect how quickly it is produced.

HARD GROUND

► *Since the ground has been frozen, my horse has developed hoof bruises. What can I do to protect his hooves when the ground freezes solid?*

.....

As your experience shows, frozen ground can be hard on a horse's feet. The concussion of footfalls against the unyielding surface can lead to both bruising and general footsoreness. A frozen field can be as hard as concrete, a surface you'd never consider suitable for a gallop. So use a bit of common sense when riding and slow down when the footing is frozen. A good rule of thumb is that if your horse's footfalls make a

ringing noise, the ground is too hard for anything more than walking. On the other hand, there's no need to limit turnout when pastures are frozen. In a friendly herd, a horse will adopt a comfortable and safe activity level on his own.

If your horse does become footsore during the winter, call your veterinarian. He can locate a bruise with hoof testers and/or by paring the sole to detect discoloration. If your horse has a bruise, your veterinarian may recommend shoeing with pads to allow the area to heal and prevent further bruising.

But just as important as diagnosing bruising is ruling out other causes of hoof soreness. Mild "ouchiness" is a commonly overlooked sign of chronic laminitis. Even though pastures aren't lush this time of year, at-risk horses can still develop laminitis or may be contending with pain from a flare-up that began in the fall.

ABSCESS RISK

► *My horse has been battling hoof abscesses since the weather turned cooler. Just as one heals another pops up. I thought hard ground contributes to abscesses, not winter mud. What is causing them?*

.....

Hoof bruises are associated with repeated concussion on hard ground, but abscesses can arise from different sets of circumstances.

Abscesses are pockets of pus that form when bacteria enter the hoof capsule and multiply in the moist, anaerobic conditions. Because the hoof wall is rigid, pressure from the pus builds quickly and can be quite painful. A horse with an abscess can go from sound to three-legged lame literally overnight. The pain

conditions cause the hoof wall to expand and then contract quickly, causing tiny cracks to develop that allow bacteria to enter. Horses who have weak, brittle feet are at an even higher risk for abscesses in the winter months.

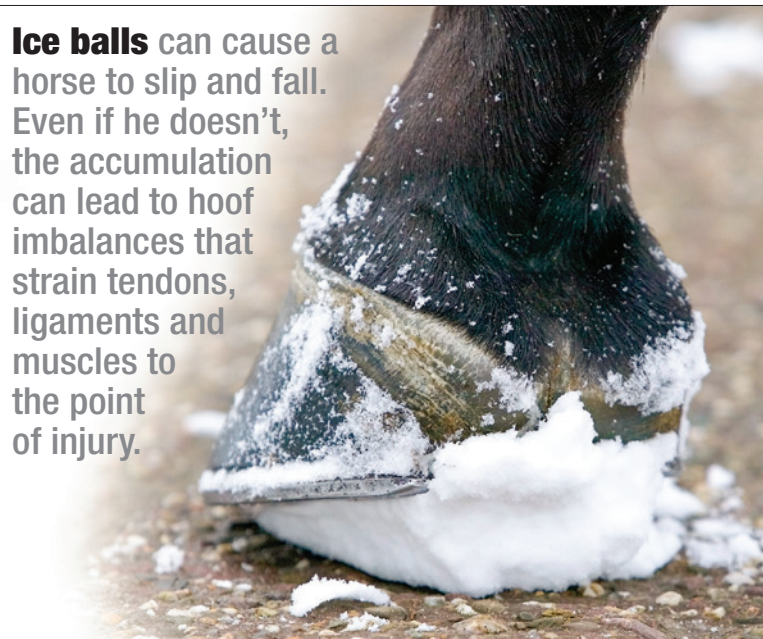
You can prevent winter hoof abscesses by improving

efforts to locate it within the hoof and, if possible, drain it.

Your role in follow-up care will likely involve repeated soaking and wrapping of the hoof, possibly for several weeks. This isn't an easy job in the depths of winter, but it's important for restoring your horse to soundness.

The icy accumulations in your horse's hooves form when the snow melts slightly after touching the sole, then refreezes as it comes in contact with the shoe. You'll notice that unshod horses hardly ever have this problem. Ice balls can cause a horse to slip and fall. Even if he doesn't, the accu-

ARND BRONKHORST



Ice balls can cause a horse to slip and fall. Even if he doesn't, the accumulation can lead to hoof imbalances that strain tendons, ligaments and muscles to the point of injury.

Alternating periods of wet and dry weather, a common winter scenario in many parts of the country, can lead to abscess formation.

persists until the abscess drains, either through a hole made by a farrier or veterinarian or by bursting through the sole, heel or coronary band on its own.

Alternating periods of wet and dry weather, a common winter scenario in many parts of the country, can lead to abscess formation. These

your horse's hoof quality as much as possible before the cold weather arrives. This may involve the use of a supplement or specialized trimming to strengthen hoof walls, heels and soles over time.

If your horse does develop an abscess, your farrier and veterinarian will coordinate

ICE BALL FORMATION

► *Is there any reliable way to prevent wet snow from packing into a horse's shoes? My gelding regularly comes in from the field teetering on ice balls that are several inches thick. I use the claw of a hammer to pry them out, which I know isn't the safest solution. A friend told me to try cooking spray to stop them from forming, but it doesn't seem to work. What does?*

mulation can lead to hoof imbalances that strain tendons, ligaments and muscles to the point of injury. It's a problem that you want to avoid.

The advice to try cooking spray, petroleum jelly or vegetable shortening is well-meaning and, in theory, make sense. All of these products will keep ice from sticking to the metal of the shoe. However, in wet, wintry conditions they tend to wash away—and thus lose effectiveness—quickly.

A more reliable preventive

DUSTY PERIN

tactic is to have your farrier put snow pads between your horse's shoes and hoof. They have a convex bubble in the center that pops with each step, forcing snow back out. Another good option is snow "rim" pads that don't cover the entire sole but extend just far enough from the shoe to prevent snow from accumulating. As long as manure and muck aren't allowed to build up in the hoof, both products will keep snowballs from forming.

A quick point about on-the-spot solutions for ice balls that have already formed: You're right that prying the ice free with the claw of a hammer isn't a good idea. A better solution would be to slightly melt the ice with a hair dryer so it falls free on its own.

SLIPPERY FOOTING

► *I'd like to continue trail riding over the winter months, but between frozen ground and occasional icy patches it feels a bit treacherous. What's the best way to add traction to my horse's shoes?*

.....

The answer is, "It depends." You have several options when it comes to traction devices and you'll want to talk to your farrier about which is best suited for your horse. You'll need to consider several factors, including the fact that with increased traction comes

increased torsion and stress on muscles, bones and ligaments. Therefore, you'll want only as much "grip" as is necessary for your conditions.

Traction options include:

- *Swedged or fullered shoes*, which have a groove on the ground-facing surface to increase "grab." These are similar to *rimmed shoes*, which have a raised edged around the inner, outer or both rims.

- *Tungsten carbide*, a superhard material in several products including Borium and Carbraze, is applied to steel shoes either before they are sold or by the farrier on-site using a forge. The rough material digs into smooth, hard surfaces and can be applied to the heels or toes of a shoe or across the entire surface.

- *Calks* are broad, square projections built into the heel of the shoe. Because these are permanent fixtures, you commit to that level of traction until an entirely different shoe is put in place.



GET A GRIP: Studs (right) come in different shapes designed to meet various footing challenges. A rim pad (left) can prevent snow buildup.



• *Studs* are set into holes at various locations on the shoe and come in different shapes designed to conquer various footing challenges. Long, narrow studs dig into mud, while studs that are short and squat are better for gripping ice. Some types of studs are pounded into holes in the shoe before it is attached to the hoof. Removing those studs requires removing the shoe, but the same shoe can be replaced, sans studs, right away. Other studs are screwed into threaded holes by a rider after the shoe is on the horse and can be removed later while the shoe is still in place. Removing tight screw-in studs can be a physically difficult job, but they offer the most versatility.

With both calks and studs, you'll also want to consider the safety of other horses that share a turnout space with your horse; a kick from a shoe with either can cause significant lacerations.

For unshod horses, the only way to increase traction is hoof boots designed for slick footing. There is a learning curve to fitting and applying boots, so it's a good idea to try them out before the weather turns. Some manufacturers make traction devices that can be added to existing boots, so if you are already using a particular style or brand, explore that option first.

PERSISTENT THRUSH

► *What is it about winter that gives my horse horrible thrush? His feet have been smelly since Thanksgiving.*

First of all, make sure you are actually dealing with thrush. All horse feet smell a bit, but thrush has a distinct knock-you-over rotting odor. This multi-organism infection will also create a blackish ooze on the underside of the hoof, particularly in the clefts and crevices near the frog. Mistakenly treating a

keeping can trigger or exacerbate the condition.

Horses tend to spend more time in the stalls during winter and, if those stalls are not fastidiously cleaned, that means more time standing in organic matter that provides nourishment for thrush organisms.

Muck stalls daily or even twice a day if your horse is spending more time indoors than out. Confinement to a stall also means less movement, which is a significant contributor to thrush. Exercise is good for hooves because with every step a

in a pasture can make it difficult to clear up. Spread gravel or wood chips in the run-in shed or popular congregation areas to give his hooves a chance to dry out.

A variety of effective over-the-counter products are available for treating thrush. Any formula you choose will work best if the solution penetrates the crevices of the hoof. A good application technique is to wrap the end of a hoof pick in cotton, dip that into the solution, and then swab it into the depths of the hoof.

ARNOLD BRONKHORST



hoof for thrush is a waste of time and money—plus it can lead to complications that cause other problems.

In areas of the country where winter means long stretches of freezing temperatures, thrush may actually clear up on its own because the causal organisms cannot survive subzero conditions. In more moderate climates, however, the realities of wintertime horse

horse takes, they expand and contract to push out mud and muck. Provide as much turnout time as possible in the winter months to help reduce your horse's chance of developing thrush.

Also, pay attention to the places where your herd congregates during turnout. Although "clean" mud doesn't contribute as much to thrush as dirty bedding does, chronically moist conditions

Horsekeeping in winter is a challenge, for sure. You've got a lot to keep track of, and shorter days with freezing conditions don't make it any easier. But don't overlook your horse's hooves at this time of year. If something doesn't seem right, it probably isn't, and addressing it now will help ensure you can get back in the saddle once the weather breaks. ●

FELT GREAT THEN. FEELS GREAT NOW.

Daily comfort and a second career
are possible with Bute-Less®.

A proven blend of devil's claw, B-12 and yucca, Bute-Less provides long-term comfort and recovery support that is as gentle on the stomach as it is powerful on daily aches and pains. So your senior can stay fluid, comfortable and ready for an incredible second act.

Save \$5 on Bute-Less at ABSORBINE.COM/OFFERS.



AVAILABLE IN PASTE,
PELLET AND LIQUID SOLUTION.

©2019 W.F. Young, Inc.