



# What's Up Doc?

January 2018

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# Winter Hoof Care for Horses

Summer is busy with training and horse shows. Then fall is catch up time trying to fix farm implements that may have been broken during show season. Winter care on the farm always adds extra chores from breaking ice on the water tank to blanketing schedules and extra hay. Making sure to keep on top of everything until spring returns. Some things may get overlooked but one very important part of winter care for your horse is their hooves. Horse hooves require vigilance to prevent season specific problems.

During the cold months horse hooves usually slow their growth. Many farriers will suggest extended time between trims. "If the normal schedule is eight weeks, a horse may be able to go nine or even ten weeks between visits" says Dr. Zacharias. Every horse is an individual and needs specialized care. Horse hooves grow more

slowly in the winter due to multiple factors. Hoof growth changes come from the horse's overall health, his environment, feeding protocol, exercise routine, and hoof care. Horse hooves grow faster in the summer because horses typically get to move around more freely, and are eating grass with more sugars; however, the winter is the exact opposite. After the first few freezes, pasture grasses have little nutritional value. When horses are more sedentary there is less circulation running to the foot and the growth process slows down. If a horse has cracked or unbalanced feet, slow hoof growth is not ideal. The best way to keep the hooves growing at a normal pace is to keep the horse's activity level up thereby keeping circulation flowing.

Horses can get bruises by walking on the lumpy, frozen ground. If your horse has bruised feet a call to the farrier is in order. They may need to help relieve the pressure on the bruises to improve the horses comfort. Abscesses are also more common in the winter due to the variance of wet and dry weather. Hoof walls expand and contract more frequently, this allows bacteria to enter the foot and create an abscess. A veterinarian can diagnose an abscess and potentially aid in drainage. Farriers can help with the aftercare of an abscess. One benefit of cold winter weather is that thrush does not do well. If your horse has thrush, a cold spell is the time to finish off the bacterial invasion. Dry footing is your friend when thrush is afoot.

Another winter hoof challenge is when ice and snow pack in a horse's hoof. This can cause bruising, excessive strain on tendons and ligaments, and the horse is in constant danger of losing balance and falling or slipping and straining already tense structures. Snow especially packs into horse's feet that have shoes. Snow melts and seeps between the hoof wall and shoe, then freezes again when it meets the cold metal of the shoe. Snow will continue to accumulate and create that ball of ice.



There are some folk remedies for keeping the ice at bay. After removing the ice and completely drying the hoof, many people try using petroleum jelly, or Pam cooking spray. These methods only work until the product wears off. Horses with shoes have proven options for keeping snow from sticking to the bottom of the foot. There are two basic types of anti-snowball pads. Rim pads show just around the inside of the shoe. They allow access to the sole of the hoof and frog. The second type of anti-snowball pad covers the entire sole and frog. They have a bubble that forces snow out with every step. Keeping ice build-up out of shod horses will protect the investment in shoes and the horse's stability and comfort.



Winter hoof care shouldn't have to be a full-time job, but it does need to be taken seriously. Be aware of your horse's footing and how prone your horse is to getting ice packed in their feet. If you are concerned about injury, then the safest place for a horse is going to be out of the snow, but that's not always practical. Doing your best to remove the ice and keep your horse on dry, even footing will help prevent sprains and strains to the muscles, tendons and joints.

## What YOU need for the National Western Stock Show

**Bovine:** Official Individual Identification (USDA Silver metal tags, 840 tags, Brucellosis orange metal tag, or Brucellosis orange 840 tag)  
Certified Veterinary Inspection (Health Certificate)  
Bovine Viral Diarrhea test (BVD)

**Sheep:** Scrapie tag  
Certified Veterinary Inspection (Health Certificate) with scrapie statement

**Goats:** USDA tag, registration tattoo with breed certificate  
Certified Veterinary Inspection (Health Certificate)

**Pigs:** Ear notch (Pure bred pigs need papers to match the ear notch)  
Certified Veterinary Inspection (Health Certificate)

**Horses:** Certified Veterinary Inspection (Health Certificate)  
Coggins recommended

**Call the front office- we are happy to help! 970-351-7045**