

## Prevent and Treat Those Pesky Paddock Sores

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A lot of horses aren't treated to a posh bed each night. Many spend much of their lives in dry paddocks or corrals, where the ground can be quite unforgiving. Over time, open sores can develop on the front of a horse's fetlocks or ankles. That's because there simply isn't enough fat, hide or hair over that area to cushion the joint when the horse lies down. The sores might heal temporarily, like when a winter coat insulates the skin, but each time the horse scuffs up the area the scabs will crack and ooze, a veritable playground for flies. The open wounds can also become infected with a variety of organisms. Eventually these pressure sores become "decubitus ulcers" which is a medical term for chronic bed sores or pressure sores. When allowed to penetrate the upper layers of skin, scar tissue and a callus forms, leaving a permanent blemish.

The best treatment for paddock sores is prevention. If your horse is stabled on hard ground, consider adding rubber mats to his corral, especially where he's likely to lie down at night. An even better choice is to add a thick layer of bedding material that will serve as a buffer between your horse's joints and the ground.

If you can't alter your horse's environment, then protective boots are necessary. The most popular styles are constructed of neoprene lined in a soft material such as fleece. Adjustable straps secure the boots around your horse's ankles. Several brands are available. You can locate them online, in catalogs or at major tack stores.

Another solution is to make your own set of boots from a pair of polo wraps and put them on your horse each night. Cut a pair of polos to size, so that they'll wrap three times around your horse's front ankles. That's about 1/3 the regular length of a pair of polos. Make sure you've fully covered the front of the fetlock joint with all three layers of the polo. The Velcro tabs will secure them in place. Since you are using them only as light padding, not as support, it's alright if they fit loosely. Besides, you never want to leave tight polo wraps on your horse for any reason.

Unfortunately, these measures only work to stop the progression of paddock sores. If your horse already sports some serious decubitus ulcers, you'll need to have your vet advise you as to the best course of treatment. First you'll have to get the area clean and dry. Then you'll be instructed to apply a topical dressing and wrap the entire leg with thick quilts and bandages. Once the sores heal completely, then you can enlist the help of the protective boots or wraps. Eventually both you and your horse will sleep easier.