

Navicular Pain and Equine Podiatry

Navicular Disease, Navicular Syndrome, Pain in the Navicular Area. These are all common veterinary terms which relate to pain in the back of the hoof.

Initial signs may just be that the horse becomes sluggish or short striding. Closer inspection of the way they walk will reveal that they prefer to land with their toes first in an effort to protect the heel area from concussion. Veterinary nerve blocks in the back portion of the hoof will bring the horse sound, pointing to a diagnosis of Navicular. X-rays of the navicular bone may show changes to the bone, leading to a diagnosis of "Navicular Disease". Often the Deep Digital Flexor Tendon which runs over this bone shows damage in this area. If the bone appears untouched, the diagnosis will be "Navicular Syndrome" or "Pain in the Navicular Area" - a catch-all phrase meaning pain in the back portion of the hoof.

There are many causes of "Navicular", and the key to bringing the horse sound is pinpointing, then eliminating the cause. Here are some examples of client's horses with "Navicular"



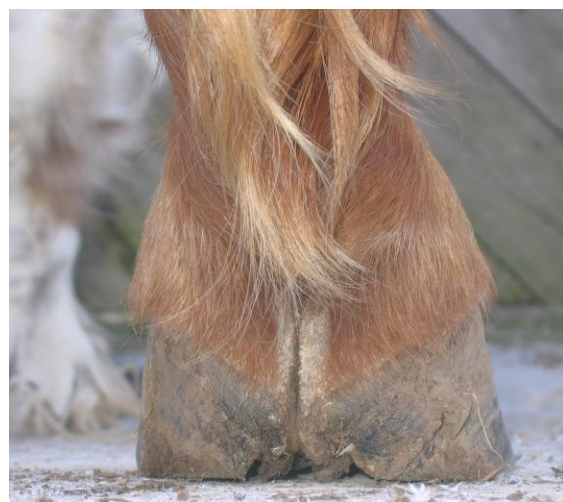
This horse had been X-rayed and found to have significant changes to the navicular bone. She had been in remedial shoes for 2 weeks but managed to rip them off. She was in a great deal of pain. Her feet were badly broken up and unbalanced and the soft structures inside the back portion of the hoof (her shock absorbers) were very weak and atrophied.

She was fitted with hoof boots and supportive pads, together with a cushion under her frogs to protect her navicular area from concussion, then hand walked on specific surfaces every day to begin to restore her natural shock absorbers.

3 months later we spent over an hour trying to catch her as she was galloping soundly around the field.

This horse's heels were so close together that his heel bulbs touched. He had a deep infection indicated by the crack in the back of his leg which had been unnoticed and untreated. In the 10 years the owner has owned this horse, she has had less than 4 years riding from him. The rest of the time he has been lame in spite of years of remedial shoeing.

The infection has been treated and he is sound enough to be ridden in boots and pads which are stimulating his soft structures to return to health. It may take years before he fully recovers, but he's comfortable now, so what does it matter?



Egg bar and heart bar shoes can provide temporary relief for horses with navicular pain because they stabilise the back portion of the hoof. However, they only mask the pain and are usually considered to be shoes that simply buy the horse more time as a usable riding horse. However, they do nothing to strengthen the weak internal structures that are usually the cause.

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Flat footed horses are frequently diagnosed as "Navicular" cases. This horse has collapsed heels which are typical of the condition. At the time I first saw these feet I warned the owner that his rehabilitation would be a long haul as the soft structures in the back of the hoof had completely collapsed. Now, 15 months later he relies less and less on his hoof boots and recently completed a hunter trial barefoot with no problems.

April 2006



July 2007



Trying to tackle the issue mechanically can cause more problems than it solves. The above hoof had undergone a large amount of remedial farriery to attempt to raise the heels and ease pressure on the navicular tendon as well as shortening the toes to help with breakover. This is the human equivalent of putting a flat footed person in high heels. I worked with the owner to build the hoof's internal structures through gentle exercise on specific surfaces - look at the shape of the cartilage at the back of the hoof indicated by the green arrow. I also rebalanced the hoof. The difference in angle of the hoof capsule is about 9 degrees, which brought the horse back to full soundness within weeks.

Oct 06



Jan 07



Flat feet are often thought to be conformation defects, but I believe this to rarely be the case. The key to the above hoof problem was nutritional. The clues are all there. Swelling around the coronet band, growth rings, brittle horn, underrun heels, etc. By adjusting the feed, the hoof is reverting back to its correct shape with the help of some regular trimming.

Applied Equine Podiatry has a phenomenal success rate in the treatment of navicular related conditions thanks to its original approach. The hoof capsule leaves many vital clues on the outside as to what is going on within. The secret of successful equine podiatry is knowing how to interpret the clues and use them to tailor a rehabilitation programme that returns the hoof to health from the inside out.