

HORSE HOOF DISEASES

BRITTLE HOOF

As the name indicates, we have in this condition an abnormally dry state of the horn.

Symptoms of a brittle hoof

This is obvious. The horn is hard, and when cut by the farrier's tools gives the impression of being baked hard and stony, the natural polish of the external layer is wanting, and there is present, usually, a tendency to contracted heels. With the dryness is a liability to fracture, especially at points where the shoe is attached by the nails.

As a consequence, the shoes are easily cast, leading to splits in the direction of the horn fibres. These run dangerously near the sensitive structures, giving rise in many cases to lameness. Even where pronounced lameness is absent the action becomes short and 'groggy,' and the utmost care is required in the shoeing to keep the animal at work.

CAUSES OF A BRITTLE HOOF

To a very great extent the condition is hereditary, and is observed frequently in animals of the short, 'cobby' type.

Animals who have had their feet much in water — as, for instance, those bred and reared on marshy soils — and afterwards transferred to the constant dryness of stable bedding, are also particularly liable to this condition.

It is noticed, too, following the excessive use of unsuitable hoof-dressings, more especially in cases where coat after coat of the dressing is applied without occasionally removing the previous applications.

CLUB-FOOT

Under this name we indicate all cases in which the horn of the wall becomes straightened from above to below. It will, therefore, include all conformations varying from the so-called 'upright hoof,' in which the toe forms an angle of more than 60 degrees with the ground, to the badly 'clubbed' foot, in which the horn at the toe forms a right angle with the ground, or is even directed obliquely backwards and downwards, so that the coronary margin overhangs the solar edge of the wall.

SYMPTOMS OF CLUB-FOOT

Even in its least pronounced form the condition is apparent at a glance, the alteration in the angle formed by the hoof with the ground striking the eye at once, and the heels, as compared with the toe, appearing much too high. When the condition is slight, the wall of the toe is about twice as high as that of the heels, while in the most marked form the toe and the heels may in height be nearly equal.

When congenital, but little interference with the action is noticed. Such animals, by reason of their 'stiltiness,' are unfit for the saddle, but at ordinary work will perform their duties equally well with the animal of normal-shaped feet. When acquired as the result of overwork, of contracted tendons, or other causes, however, the gait becomes stumbling and uncertain. The body-weight is transferred from the heels to the anterior parts of the foot, and the shoe shows undue signs of wear at the toe.

CAUSES OF CLUB-FOOT

Upright hoof is undoubtedly hereditary, and is even seen as a natural conformation in the feet of asses and mules. When hereditary in the horse, however, it is certainly a defect, and is associated commonly with an upright limb, and a short, upright pastern.

RINGED OR RIBBED HOOF

A condition of the hoof in which the wall is marked by a series of well-defined ridges in the horn, each ridge running parallel with the coronary margin.

They are known commonly as 'grass rings,' and may be easily distinguished from the more grave condition we have alluded to as following laminitis, by the mere fact that they do not, as do the laminitic rings, approximate each other in the region of the toe, but that they run round the foot, as we have already said, parallel with each other.

CAUSES

This condition is purely a physiological, and not a pathological one, and the words of its more common name, 'grass rings,' sufficiently indicate one of the most common causes. Anything tending to an alternate increase and decrease in the secretion of horn from the coronet will bring it about.

Thus, in an animal at grass, with, according to the weather conditions, an alternate moistness and dryness of the pasture, with its consequent influence on the horn secretion, these rings nearly always appear.

The effects of repeated blisters to the coronet make themselves apparent in the same way, and testify to the efficacy of blisters in this region in any case where an increased growth of horn is deemed necessary. From this it is clear that the condition depends primarily upon the amount and condition of the blood supplied to the coronary cushion.

Thus, fluctuations in temperature during a long-continued fever, or the effects of alternate heat and cold, or of healthy exercise alternated with comparative idleness, will each rib the foot in much the same manner.

TREATMENT

The condition is so simple that we may almost regard it as normal. Consequently, treatment

of any kind is superfluous. Where constitutional disturbance is exerting an influence upon either the quality or quantity of the blood directed to the part, then, of course, attention must be paid to the disease from which it is arising.

SPONGY HOOF

This is the opposite condition to the brittle hoof and is characterized by the soft and non-resistant qualities of the horn.

SYMPTOMS OF SPONGY HOOF

Spongy hoof is quite common in animals that have large, flat, and spreading feet — in fact, the two appear to run very much together. It is a common defect in animals reared in marshy districts, and of a heavy, lymphatic type.

The Lincolnshire Shire, for instance, has often feet of this description, and, the causative factors being in this case long-continued render the feet extremely predisposed to canker.

The horn is distinctly soft to the knife, and has an appearance more or less greasy. Animals with spongy feet are unfit for long journeys on hard roads. When compelled to travel thus, the feet become hot and tender, and lameness results.

A mild form of laminitis, extending over a period of three or four days, often follows on this enforced travelling on a hard road, more especially in cases where the animal is 'heavy topped,' and the usual food of a highly stimulating nature.