

HorsesLandWater

Improving the health of horses and the environment

GRASS FOUNDER

Spring flush pasture • Horse management systems

GRASS FOUNDER

This is a very common condition of ponies and occasionally horses. It is seen mostly in winter and spring when feed is abundant. Founder is a painful inflammatory disease of the structures within the horse's foot.

Ponies left untreated in the early stages can suffer further pain as the pedal bone rotates deep within the hoof, which becomes misshapen. In severe cases this bone can rotate and penetrate the sole of the hoof. Ponies which have previously foundered are prone to re-occurrence and will need careful supervision.

Common causes

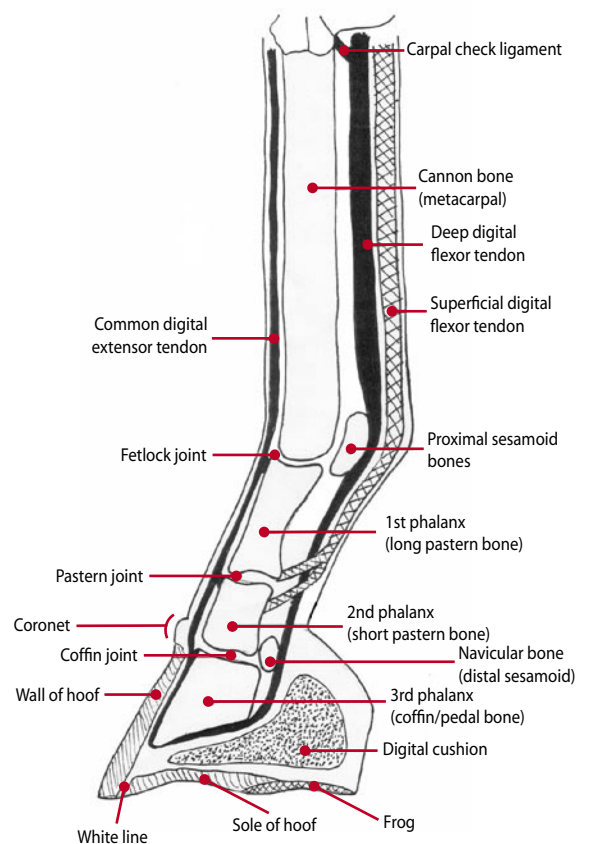
- Excessive grazing of lush pastures by ponies (and some horses) during winter and spring.
- Sudden changes in management (e.g. moving from dry sand yards and low protein feed to flush paddocks).

Symptoms

- Resting forefeet
- Shuffling weight from one leg to another.
- Walking tenderly on hard stony surfaces.
- Reluctance to move due to pain.
- 'Saw-horse' stance where the fore limb feet are placed well in front and hind limb feet well underneath the body.
- Heat in front feet due to inflammation.
- Pronounced pulse in the digital arteries of the limb.

Talk regularly with your accredited farrier, who will be able to assist in detecting early signs of founder.

The lower leg of the horse



The spring flush of pastures is a high risk time.

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Symptoms continued

Bad cases may show signs of:

- Crescent-shaped bruising and cracks over the toe region.
- Dropped sole where the sole loses the normal dished in shape (concave) and instead bulges outward (convex) because of pressure from a rotated pedal bone.
- The hoof wall rings being narrower at the toe and wider at the heel. This develops following rotation of the pedal bone which can result from a crushing injury to the coronary region at the front of the foot.
- 'Aladdin slipper' feet (mis-shapen hooves). This excessive toe growth, following rotation of the pedal bone, results in the toe of the hoof curling up over time if not trimmed regularly by a farrier.

What to do

- Remove the horse to a yard or stable.
- Contact a veterinarian to visit and evaluate the case.
- Follow the recommended treatment plan which will involve a managed feeding and exercise program and a specialised farrier's care.

Land Management

- Learn to recognise changes in pasture growth, which can be quite sudden.
- Minimise access to lush pastures. Confine ponies and horses to yards or stables if pasture feed is excessive.
- Incorporate electric fencing into paddock management systems to rotationally graze and control feed intake. Cross-graze paddocks with sheep and cattle if possible.
- Increase stocking rate if understocked.
- Seek advice from a land management consultant to assist with a paddock management strategy and selection of suitable pasture mixes for your property.



Trim hooves regularly

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HorsesLandWater

PO Box 483
Plympton SA 5038
Phone (08) 8294 2460
Email horsesa@horsesa.asn.au
Web www.horseslandwater.com