



HORSEMANSHIP

HEALTH & HEALING

Poulticing to improve Health and Performance

Horses can store a lot of toxins in their bodies which stiffen them up and restrict performance, cause behavioural problems and lead to chronic health and soundness issues. The bladder and kidneys can become overloaded and unable to fully eliminate the toxins and waste products of the body, when the body is under stress emotionally or physically, or when the horses are over mineralized, fed feeds that are too rich, incompatible and not easily digested or if they have ingested or come into contact with chemicals commonly used on pastures and in fodder growing practices today. These toxins, including lactic acid and uric acid, when not excreted through urine and faeces are stored in the bodily tissues. The feet and legs are like a drainage system for the excess toxins in the body so therefore they are the worst affected. The feet and legs themselves can also pick up infections, viruses, or chemicals through the skin and through the soles and walls of the feet.

A build up of toxicity in the legs restricts circulation and stiffens joints leading to arthritis and other joint disorders. The congestion tightens muscles, tendons, ligaments and sinews, shortening the stride and restricting movement. The excess tension here can even lead to the rest of the body, muscles and skeletal structures, being pulled out of balance and alignment. Windgalls, bog spavin, bowed tendons, arthritis, puffy stiff joints and puffiness around the tendon areas are all examples of congestion and accumulation of toxicity in the body. Conformational disorders like "over bent of the knees" or the reverse, are the result of tendons that are too tight and can be helped through treatment with bodywork and poulticing legs. All of the above conditions result in poor performance, discomfort, stiffness, disease, general ill health and training and behavioural problems. Usually these symptoms come on slowly causing horses to age quicker and develop chronic soundness issues which are usually looked upon as unpreventable and inevitable wear and tear.

These toxins can be released through various forms of body work therapies, administering oral kidney, bladder or liver detox formulas, soaking the feet, massaging the legs and poulticing to draw out toxicity. Ideally using combinations of all of the above will give the best results. So good horse care practices should include regular soaking of the feet, massaging of the legs, poulticing of the legs and feet and the application of good hoof dressings. The higher the level of performance that you are expecting or the more physical stress that the horse is under for example race horses, cutting horses or event horses the more important all of this will be, however, even your weekend pleasure horse will benefit immensely and appreciate this care.

In this article we will focus on poulticing, which of course can also be used for acute injuries or strains to draw out heat or infection. However even very old injuries will benefit enormously from poulticing, especially those where there is scar tissue showing as enlarged, thickened or raised areas. This deformity or scar tissue simply means that the injury has not completely healed and the injury will be still having some adverse effect on the horse's health and performance.



The circles marked with chalk indicates a kidney area of the horse. If the muscles are tight and hard in this area or the area is raised up this indicates a build up of toxicity in this area.



The area marked here is the bladder area. If it feels thick or congested through here it indicates toxicity build up and bladder issues. Bladder and kidney issues will restrict the hock and the hindquarters of the horse.



This horse was very tight over the kidney area and also felt thick and congested in the bladder area so the whole rump and loin area was poulticed with TuffRock and left over night.

What I have noticed after washing the TuffRock off is that the muscles would feel softer but often 12 hours later they would feel tight and hard again. Occasionally they have felt harder than before the poultice was put on. This is actually a positive sign because the body has been stimulated and more 'rubbish' has moved into that area ready to be pulled out. So you poultice again. The area will keep filling until all the 'rubbish' has been shifted out of the body.

TuffRock

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One of the products that we have found very effective and easy to use is TuffRock Poultice. It is the first electrically charged poultice produced and is made from volcanic rock. It has drawing qualities beyond any other manufactured poultices that we have come across so far and we have often been astounded by what it draws out. Occasionally the legs may swell and become quite hot after poulticing but this is just an indication of the heat, infection or 'rubbish' that was hidden and is now being shifted out of the body. Sometimes the heat and swelling may not appear until several hours after removing the poultice. If your horses legs appear swollen or hot, don't panic, just hose the leg and cool them down.

Wait until the heat and swelling have settled before poulticing again, but if you had a big reaction you will need to continue to poultice without using the plastic wrap until there is no reaction.

Between midnight and midday is the cleansing time for the body and poulticing during this time period will maximise results, so it is best to do it in the evening and leave it on overnight and until midday the next day if possible.

How To Apply A TuffRock Poultice To The Legs

1. Wash the legs with shampoo and allow them to dry. Using warm water and massaging the legs while shampooing is very beneficial.



2. Apply the TuffRock poultice thickly from below the knee to the fetlock or even better go all the way to the coronet and you can massage it in which will begin to stimulate the system. The poultice can be used just like this and the legs left unwrapped and this can be a good way to initially assess the legs as you will see where the poultice dries more quickly and more slowly. The areas that stay moist the longest are the areas where there are more problems -thirty to forty minutes after applying the TuffRock is a good time to go back to observe this. Poulticing the knees and hocks is also extremely beneficial.



3. For better results wrap the leg in plastic wrap. This holds the heat in for more drawing power and keeps the poultice moist so it keeps working for longer.



4. Place a foam or gamgee leg pad over the plastic wrap before bandaging will ensure that there are no pressure spots on the legs and lessen the chance of restricting circulation with the bandage.



5. Apply the bandage firmly but taking care not to go too tightly. I like to use stable bandages rather than exercise bandages as they are not as stretchy and thereby lessen the chance of being over stretched and applied too tightly.



It may be a good idea to leave the horse locked up while the bandages are on, especially if the horse hasn't been bandaged before or you are not experienced at bandaging. Again poulticing between midnight and midday will give the most benefit. Adding a small handful of water to the TuffRock Poultice before sealing the lid after use will ensure that it doesn't dry out and be ready for use next time.

When unwrapping the bandages observe the legs noticing where the heat is and if there are any wetter or dryer areas. Wash the Tuffrock off and observe again. Sometimes several hours after removing the bandages the legs may swell and fill as described earlier. For health and performance it is critical to help the body get rid of these toxins in the legs.

The feet and legs are an area where there is generally not enough attention paid and you will notice significant improvements in your horses through investing more time and attention here.

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