

## WHAT IS NATURAL HOOF CARE?

The term "Natural Hoof Care" describes a *complete daily care system* that is used in conjunction with a physiologically correct barefoot trim. A natural style of horse keeping will allow a horse to remain barefoot throughout its entire working life in all disciplines. This same system can be used to rehabilitate horses from many diseases and lamenesses. Natural hoof care is a method used to return horses to a lifestyle in harmony with their physiology and maintain their hooves in a manner that allows them to perform in any capacity desired by the rider. For optimum results, it is recommended that natural trimming only be used with horses that have been provided as natural an environment as possible.

The hoof is designed to serve the horse without the addition of a shoe as long as the horse is housed according to its needs and its nature. Wild horses, Mongolian ponies, horses ridden by ancient armies, and horses ridden by Native Americans were not shod and accomplished amazing feats of speed and endurance. It was only during the Middle Ages when horses of the nobility began to be confined in castles that the hooves were so weakened by confinement and from standing on straw, urine, and waste that shoeing was adopted. And with the prestige of knighthood and royalty, a shod horse began to be associated with the elite. The blacksmith guilds created and preserved a mystique about shoeing and hoof care that persists to this day.

## WHAT IS A NATURAL TRIM?

A Natural Trim is a technique of hoof trimming that balances the hoof in a physiologically correct alignment, creating a ground-parallel coffin bone with movement and allowing hoof mechanism. The term "hoof mechanism" refers to the expansion of the hoof upon weight bearing, which enhances circulation inside the foot and allows the hoof to grow strong and resilient. The horse's hoof is the third most vascular organ in his body, which serves as a heart-supporting circulatory pump. Allowing the horse to have hoof mechanism is vital to the horse's overall well being. Since the horse's heart is relatively small, it must rely on active hoof pumping for adequate circulation throughout its body. The application of shoes and the practice of incorrect trimming prevent hoof mechanism, resulting in reduced circulation within the hoof and the whole body of the horse.

The Natural Trim has evolved from the study of the hooves of Bureau of Land Management mustangs. These horses, when left to their own devices, roam wild in family bands, forage, find water and reproduce bountifully. They travel from 10 to 50 miles a day in rigorous conditions not often found in domestic settings. The balance, thickness and durability in feral hooves has been studied and documented. Through the Natural Trim many riders are getting amazing performance from their barefoot horses. We see these horses more and more commonly in show circuits, eventing, endurance, racing and in competitive trail riding, and even packing in the rugged high country!

The naturally trimmed bare hoof will have excellent and superior shock absorption. The hoof will not be susceptible to navicular disease or syndrome, founder, thrush or other hoof problems that maim our horses all too frequently. A slight case of laminitis will cause no more problems than a headache.

The Natural Trim is not easier for the owner than shoeing. It is a more complex, and at times, a more time-consuming trim, which must usually be done more often than shoeing unless the horse gets a great deal of movement. Because of the frequency of the trim, it isn't always a money saving move unless the owner learns to do some of the interim trimming him or/herself. "Ride more – trim less".

## WHAT IS A NATURAL LIFESTYLE?

Let's compare the aspects of most accepted methods of horse care and the horse's natural environment. When we compare these two lifestyles, the variance is very telling. We seem to try to give our horses things that would make us comfortable and happy and forget that the horse is designed for a completely different lifestyle. The horse is a prey animal, and we (and our dogs and cats) are predators.

**Lifestyle** – The horse is intended to live in a herd with a hierarchy, constant companionship, and the safety of numbers. Our horses often live isolated lives in stalls or solitary paddocks. Horses feel safe and comfortable in the presence of other horses. Isolation in stalls or solitary paddocks is stressful to the horse, not only emotionally, but also physically. For optimum health, horses need to have freedom of movement on 24/7 turnout with other horses as companions. It should also be noted that, while we predators feel safe and cozy in a cave, horses feel safe in wide-open spaces where they can run away from predators or other dangers. Horses don't like cozy – predators do.

**Nutrition** – The horse is designed to eat almost constantly and to eat a vast variety of food. We have relegated our horses to two or in some cases three feedings, which does not suit the equine digestive system and causes problems both with behavior and health. A horse's stomach produces digestive acids continually, whether there is food in its stomach or not. Denying a horse access to free-choice feed (mixed grass hay), even for a short time, can cause the horse pain. Eventually, this can cause problems such as stomach ulcers. Horses should be fed a natural diet of free-choice grass hay with additional minerals and/or supplements if needed to balance the horse's diet. In addition, hay should be fed at ground level to prevent respiratory and other related health problems.

**Clothing** – The horse has an excellent heat and cooling regulatory system that is suppressed and weakened with the use of blankets, hoods, leg wraps, and other similar clothing. Applying clothing to a horse not only weakens the horse's heat and cooling regulatory system, it also can reduce circulation and create problems resulting in chills and colds.

**Footing** – The footing that a horse is kept on should reflect the same conditions it will encounter when being used. If you ride or work primarily on grass, mud, water, gravel, or concrete, your horse's living conditions should reflect the same. A horse that is kept on mud or grass can't be expected to ride on gravel or concrete without soreness unless removable hoof boots are used to compensate for the lack of conditioning to hard terrain.

**Natural Hoof Care** – Shoeing is detrimental to the health of the hoof because shoes reduce circulation and contract the hoof, causing deformations and a decreased ability to heal. Natural barefoot hoofcare and consistent trimming is crucial to keep a horse healthy and sound for a long lifetime.

Dr. Strasser in *A Lifetime of Soundness* describes how horses live in their natural environment, and how we can approximate this environment for domestic horses. You can purchase this book from the resources on the attached "resources" sheet.

Jaime Jackson's new book *Paddock Paradise* is a wonderful natural alternative to normal "square green pasture" boarding, based on movement of horses in the wild. Also look for purchase information in the "resources" sheet.

The horse living in an unnatural situation has invisible negative changes in its metabolism, immune system, bone density, joints and ligaments, circulatory system, inside its feet, and in its mental and/or spiritual balance. The "natural lifestyle" or "natural boarding" is the basis for healing any illness or injury. The horse's entire physical makeup is exactly "tuned" for a particular environment (for most breeds, dry plains and desert; for some, marshy areas).

**Here are the results of one study of what a wild horse does  
Over 24 hours vs. what a stalled horse does (from Eva Mueller):**

<b>Wild Horse</b>	<b>Stalled Horse</b>
<b>60% eating</b> On the move, about 20 miles (30 km.) Daily.	<b>47% eating</b> Not moving
20% standing	40% standing
10% lying down	10% lying down
10% other (Play, social activities, mating)	3% other (Play, social activities, mating)

Please note that horses were created to thrive in their natural environment and *require* it for optimal health. For this reason, we should make changes in our horse's boarding situation so that the activities shift as much as possible towards the wild-horse lifestyle. It may take some work to arrange for some of these changes. Begin with what you can provide easily: as much space as possible, companionship, no blankets or bedding, and constant access to proper feed. (Note: Unlimited lush green pastures can be very detrimental to horses and hoof care, especially for those horses that tend to be "easy keepers" or have a founder/laminitis history. Refer to the [www.safergras.org](http://www.safergras.org) website for grazing specifics.)

## TRANSITION TO BAREFOOT:

Inside a shod hoof or an incorrectly trimmed bare hoof, there is not enough blood circulation to keep the internals of the foot in good condition. Weakened by lack of nutrients, the white line becomes stretched, so that the coffin bone settles down slightly onto the sole corium (corium-vascular tissue that supplies blood and nutrients) and/or rotates. This aggravates or inflames the sole corium. The hoof horn quality will also be weakened by reduced circulation, so the wall may initially wear faster than it grows. The growth of the hooves may take some time to catch up to the amount of wear, but this is only achieved once the hoof is receiving more circulation and movement.

The horse will not go sound on gravel (or other hard or uneven terrain) until the hoof horn is growing strong and supple, the white line has healed and tightened up, and the coffin bone is held firmly up inside the hoof wall. This should *generally* happen within a year to a year-and-a-half, with a consistently renewed, physiologically correct trim and proper natural environment.

Do not expect to ride your horse on gravel, pavement, or rocky trails without **hoof boots**, during the first year after pulling the shoes. Some horses will also go sore on deep sand or other very soft arena footing. In soft or deep sand, the foot sinks in toe first, rather than flexing with concussion on a firmer surface with the coffin bone ground parallel; the hoof gets no circulation and quickly becomes uncomfortably congested.

Hoof wall grows down from the hairline (coronet), about 1/4 inch (7 mm) per month. When you pull the shoes and perform a physiologically correct trim, there will be much better circulation to the foot. The corium (a layer of blood vessels that nourishes hoof tissues) receives a good supply of nutrients and begins to build high-quality wall, frog, and sole. After the initial shoe removal and trim, a much tighter hoof wall connection and proper angle will be noted in the new growth. This is seen as a ridge in the hoof wall with tighter hoof growth above.

There is also potential for a shod horse or a horse that has had poor trimming to have soreness and/or hoof abscessing once trimmed properly and given a natural environment, until hoof health is obtained. Abscessing in the hooves may occur once circulation is sufficiently restored to enable it. In most cases, a shod horse or a poorly trimmed horse does not have enough circulation to expel this dead tissue through abscessing. This results in accumulation of dead tissue within the hoof. Once the hoof is trimmed properly and hoof mechanism is restored, the hoof may expel this dead tissue in the form of abscessing. To help a horse that is abscessing, try daily hoof soaks of 30-60 minutes in water and plenty of walking on firm, non-concussive ground. Or turn out with a padded "soak boot" filled with water. Once an abscess has "blown", try daily hoof soaking in a 1:8 apple cider vinegar and water mix, which can aid in healing.

\*\*\*If your horse has had long heels or chronic hoof pain, and is stiff in the shoulders, look for tight triceps, deltoids, and trapezius muscles. Massage therapy, chiropractic, myofascial release, SENSE movement education, and/or acupuncture will help to free up movement in the horse's muscles and joints.

Contact your hoof care practitioner for consultations, trims, or just plain encouragement. The number of barefoot horses performing; competing and providing companionship to their owners is growing very rapidly. Do not be alarmed when you read or hear of apparent conflicts of advice, but be aware that in any new body of knowledge a lot of people are moving toward a consistent body of knowledge with different emphasis and from different starting points. The important thing is that all barefoot advocates have the welfare of the horse in mind and all have astounding stories of success rehabilitating navicular, founder, and other lamenesses that in the past would have resulted in euthanasia.

Congratulations for choosing barefoot!

Sincerely,



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\* Serving Indiana and Kentucky

## **GETTING STARTED:**

### **1. Suggested Books To Order and Read:**

"**Making Natural Hoof Care Work for You**" by Pete Ramey  
[www.star-ridge.com](http://www.star-ridge.com), or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), or even E-Bay

"**A Lifetime of Soundness**", "*Shoeing: A Necessary Evil?*" and "**Who's Afraid of Founder**" by Dr. Hiltrud Strasser. All books are available for purchase at:  
<http://www.StrasserHoofcare.com> or <http://www.thehorseshoof.com/>

"Horse Owners Guide to Natural Hoof Care" and "**Founder: Prevention and Cure**" and "**Paddock Paradise: A Guide to Natural Horse Boarding**" by Jaime Jackson at  
[www.star-ridge.com](http://www.star-ridge.com), or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), or even e-Bay

"The Sound Hoof – Horse Health From the Ground Up" by Lisa Simmons Lancaster  
[www.thehorseshoof.com](http://www.thehorseshoof.com), or [www.thehorseshoof.com](http://www.thehorseshoof.com)

"The Horses Hoof" magazine at [www.thehorseshoof.com](http://www.thehorseshoof.com)

"Equine Wellness" magazine at [www.EquineWellnessMagazine.com](http://www.EquineWellnessMagazine.com)

"Natural Horse" magazine at [www.naturalhorse.com](http://www.naturalhorse.com)

### **2. Websites To Study:**

<http://www.TheHorsesHoof.com>

The Horse's Hoof website has many articles on natural barefoot lifestyle and trimming and they also sell equipment, books and videos.

[www.hoofrehab.com](http://www.hoofrehab.com) \*\*\*\*\*

This is Pete Ramey's site, which has great articles, and information. He keeps up to date on the most recent research available, and any thing that he changes in his trimming method, he personally researches, and trials to make sure that it is agreeable with the Horse. He also continues to trim for his own clients.

[www.barefoothorse.com](http://www.barefoothorse.com)

A web site by Marjorie Smith with a lot of pictures of hoof deformation and evaluation, and the site is translated into many other languages.

[www.healthyhoof.com](http://www.healthyhoof.com)

A web site by Linda Cowles, who is the President of the new American Hoof Association. It has some great information.

<http://www.NaturalHorseTrim.com>

The Natural Horse Trim website is has a wealth of information on **trimming/treating the foundered horse** without the use of shoes. Although this website is based on foundered horses, the information presented on trimming and lifestyle can be applied to all horses. This site also has a **"Boot Swap"** page for finding used hoof boots.

<http://www.TheNakedHoof.com.au>

A website done by Scott Kroeger, which has plenty of information in the form of articles, including some written by Dr. Hiltrud Strasser.

[www.ironfreehoof.com](http://www.ironfreehoof.com)

A web site by Paige Poss. that has some great information on barefoot trimming.

[www.equethy.com](http://www.equethy.com)

[www.equinextion.com](http://www.equinextion.com)

There are many other very good web sites on Barefoot Hoof Care. New ones are being created every day that may also have great information. Just start researching!

### 3. Join Several Great Barefoot Yahoo Groups:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MWHT/>

Our own local Yahoo group that is open to all of my students and clients, as well as anyone interested in barefoot hoof care. This is a great support group.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/naturalhorsetrim>

Join the NaturalHorseTrim Yahoo group. The NaturalHorseTrim Yahoo Group provides a place where horse owners, veterinarians and certified hoofcare specialists can share experiences and ideas, ask and answer questions regarding natural barefoot trimming and horse keeping methods.

If you have trouble joining the group, contact [gretchenfathauer@prodigy.net](mailto:gretchenfathauer@prodigy.net)

[abrasivehorsehooftrimming@yahoogroups.com](mailto:abrasivehorsehooftrimming@yahoogroups.com)

This Yahoo group delves into trimming with an angle grinder and abrasive flap discs. This technique is really an energy saver, on those very hard hooves, and thick walls of foundered hooves; as well as expending much less time and physical effort while trimming any horse, allowing more time for riding!

### 4. Purchase Hoof Trimming Equipment:

You'll need a hoof knife (having both a right-handed and left-handed knife is a good idea), a hoof rasp and gloves. Optional: nippers, hoof jack, apron, stool and angle grinder. I trim almost exclusively with the angle grinder now, but there are those horses that have some

aversion to power tools, so I always have my hand tools available. Please see the "resources" page in this packet for websites that sell this equipment.

## 5. Attend a Clinic or Lecture:

Find a clinic or lecture in your area to enhance your knowledge of the Natural Trim and to get hands-on trimming instruction.

Contact your local Natural Hoof Care Provider for their individual clinic/lecture schedules.  
[StephOhlemacher@aol.com](mailto:StephOhlemacher@aol.com)

## RESOURCES:

### Equipment, Books & Videos:

The following websites sell equipment (hoof knives, rasps, gloves, etc.), books and videos that will help you in your transition to barefoot.

<http://www.TheHorsesHoof.com>  
[www.star-ridge.com](http://www.star-ridge.com)  
[www.abchoofcare.com](http://www.abchoofcare.com)  
<http://www.StrasserHoofcare.com>  
[www.hoofrehab.com](http://www.hoofrehab.com)

Overland Farrier Supply, Redmond, OR 1-800-838-5277

(Hoof knives, rasps, aprons, hoof jacks, nippers, sharpeners, etc.)

Mid-West Farrier Supply [www.mwfarrier.com](http://www.mwfarrier.com)

Stockhoff's Farrier Supply, Crestwood, KY 1-800-421-1002, or 502-241-7717

### Hoof boots:

To ease the transition to barefoot, hoof boots and pads are a wonderful/and necessary addition. They are very helpful when, during transition, you must ride on gravel roads or rocky trails. They are also helpful for horses that are worked frequently on abrasive surfaces that wear the feet faster than they are growing. (This will not occur once the feet are restored to health – then the abrasion will stimulate very rapid growth!) Removable hoof boots are also very helpful for sore, foundered, or navicular horses that won't move readily on their own. Hoof boots have been found to assist in restoring a healthy hind foot/digital cushion. Hoof boots and pads also allow you to ride your horse, and assist in healing the foot faster than with barefoot alone. Hoof boots and pads also keep potential injuries to a minimum with high performance horses.

\*Boa Boots, Easyboots, Easyboot Epics, Easyboot Bare, Easy Soakers at [www.easycareinc.com](http://www.easycareinc.com)

*Davis Soaking Boots:* <http://www.DavisManufacturing.com/>

*Old Mac's, Old Mac G2 Hoof* <http://www.easycareinc.com>

*Boots:*

*Sabre Sneakers:* <http://www.SabreSneaker.com>

*Horsneakers:* <http://www.Horsneakers.com>

Marquis Supergrip - <http://www.forthethehorse.com/> (click on the link to "Stride Equus")

Hoof Wing hoof boots: - <http://www.castleplastics.com/hoofboots.html>

See your Natural Hoof Care Provider for boot fitting and products. You can also find many of these boots in horse supply catalogs. Just remember to measure your horse after a good barefoot trim. You can find pictures and measuring information for many of the above boots at [www.naturalhorsetrim.com](http://www.naturalhorsetrim.com) Section 15, as well as a hoof boot swap site. All Easy Care Boots and Pads have fitting instructions on their web site.

## Nutritional Supplements:

Advanced Biological Concepts @ <http://www.a-b-c-plus.com/> : Their mission statement: Improve the quality of life for mankind; by improving the quality of life for animals through natural nutrition. ABC'S Guidelines for achieving this mission statement:

- Always focus on the cause of a disease or problem, not the symptom
- Refrain from Research and Development involved in symptom relief

-We believe most poor health problems in animals are due to a nutritional deficiency caused by the confinement of animals, thereby limiting their access to a variety of nutritional ingredients

-Often improvement in health can be dramatic when furnishing a balanced diet or adding nutrients lacking in the animal's diet. Not unlike giving food to a starving animal, this creates a dramatic improvement in health. This mode of nutritionally assisting animals must not be confused with drug therapy or medicine. We do not prescribe replacing the body's own mode of action through supplementation with synthetic chemicals and artificial components. We supply the body with what it needs to repair itself

-We do not prescribe the use of poisons or mega doses of single nutrients to enhance performance

**Information on the current research and prevention of grass founder in horses visit: <http://www.safergrass.org/>**

**Holistic Products for Horses:**

<http://www.theholistichorse.com>