



100%
hemp

www.hempforhorse.com
Now Available for Your Horse & Dog
in a Natural Feed Supplement

[Natural Horse Home](#) >> [Members Page](#) >> [Volume8](#) >> [Issue2](#) >> [Article 12](#)

Volume 8 Issue 2

Spotlight on The Equine Touch

Hooves and Body: Anything Affects Everything

By Jock and Dr. Ivana Ruddock

During our travels we continue to find that 'barefoot-mania' still remains the hottest and most controversial topic of discussion among horse owners and professionals worldwide. There is an almost desperate need to exchange information about the hoof anatomy and function, the role of individual parts of the foot during movement as well as to understand the new approaches to barefoot trimming that are constantly emerging. Many horses that are returning to a natural barefoot status still suffer due to either neglect, ignorance, egotism or too radical a technique which leaves them crippled for years during this period of so called 'transitional rehabilitation'.

Balanced and properly functioning hooves play one of the most important roles in the well being of the wholistic horse. As bodyworkers we are very aware that balanced feet are the key to long term success of not only our Equine Touch™ but many equine therapies. It is a recognized fact that no musculoskeletal, or skeletal realignment for that matter, will last if the feet are out of balance, are compensating for an imbalance, or are in pain, not to mention the emotional tension and stress that the horse is under.

We have to remember just as hooves affect the body so the body affects the hooves. If there are problems, for example pain in the muscles (from any origin), the compensation factor will compromise the balance and function of the hoof. The continual landing on one part of the hoof instead of on the flat (due to spasms or pain in the soft tissue for example) will concentrate concussion forces into that specific area, cause damage, and finally destroy living tissue, affecting the blood supply and causing pain.

The posture of the animal will ultimately change, and to maintain 'balance' while in this compensation mode from the painful feet (or body) the horse will also make use of his head as a counter-balance in order to adjust his body weight to alleviate discomfort. Holding the head constantly in certain positions in an effort to reduce the pain however will very quickly affect the chewing pattern and temporo-mandibular joint, and after only a short time the teeth will begin to exhibit pathological wear.

The training and performance of the horse will then come under direct compromise as the presence of hooks and points on the teeth in the mouth can cut painfully into the gums during attempts to turn or collect the horse. This in turn affects the safety of the rider as apart from the physical difficulties, the emotions (which influence behavior) can be extremely volatile. In trying to avoid this discomfort in his mouth the horse will endeavor to use his body differently, putting extra pressure onto compensating muscles and hooves. Now we are faced with a horse firmly locked into a vicious circle. This is only one scenario of how 'anything of influence' on the horse's body affects everything.

There are many 'Elements of Influence': hooves, teeth, saddle, rider, training, nutrition and environment being the 'Equine Big Seven'. Each has an effect on the other, the hooves having an effect on any or all of the other six and any of the other six capable of having a direct or indirect effect on the hooves.

Working with many veterinarians, trimmers and ferriers (or farriers, from 'ferrum', iron) we were often asked to assist them with our Equine Touch™ techniques during periods of rehabilitation of the hoof or transition from shod to barefoot.

We find that, especially during this 'adaptation time', horses greatly benefit from this gentle bodywork and that The Equine Touch™ itself is complementary to any intelligent trimming program. If the rehabilitation of the hoof is to be successful, however, all the 'Elements of Influence' must be taken into consideration, because natural environment, revised nutrition and dental care are as essential a part of this phase as is bodywork.

When making the change from shod to barefoot it is very important to address the hooves sensitively and carefully, trimming the feet non-invasively to allow the complete hoof to work physiologically without stress. This is the 'publicized' goal of many techniques, but from practical experience the integrity of these goals is

jeopardized all too often with too fast an approach or too radical and invasive a trim causing pain to the horse.

If a horse is in pain as a result of a barefoot trim, it is counterproductive. Removing hoof material while it is needed (destruction) causes sensitivity and pain and undermines hoof structure, interrupting and discouraging hoof reconstruction. Such trimming can start the horse on a downward path that has in some instances ended up unfortunately as being the direct cause of death to the horse.

In this 'phase-of-change' from shod to barefoot it is most important to keep the horse relaxed in his maximum comfort zone. This will then encourage the healing and allow him the natural movement that is so crucial for optimum re-growth and rehabilitation of the hoof.

Addressing the body with a gentle hands-on technique is beneficial for soft tissue and helps re-educate the proprioceptors which, due to the changes, could be in confusion. At the Equine Touch Foundation we believe that a gentle and non-invasive approach is more effective than extensive or deep techniques.

Bodywork can be performed prior to trimming. Working with a relaxed, calm and cooperative horse will assist in the completion of a balanced trim as the released muscles will not lie about the true posture or conformation of the horse. We have received many reports from owners and ferrriers that an Equine Touch™ session helped to calm down 'troubled horses' - even those who normally required sedation prior to their hooves being worked on.

Equine Touch™ bodywork performed as a body balancing session immediately after a trim, as well as perhaps an area-of-concern address of the legs, have been shown to have beneficial properties, assisting the horse in recognizing and accepting his new stance.

Equine Touch™ has a proven history of improving lymphatic and blood circulation, which is extremely important in the healing process. By stimulating the horse's nervous system, it brings awareness to the different parts of the body as well as encouraging muscle tone - especially if the horse is showing atrophy of the muscles. Equine Touch™ is also helpful in recovering the normal function of the fascia, which assists in healing and achieving proper function of the muscular system.

As a support and therapeutic aid while in this stage, Equine Touch™ has been performed with success on a four-day to weekly maintenance schedule. Equine Touch™ assists the horse by reducing any pain spiral present, balancing his body, encouraging relaxation, and encouraging his own healing system to work at its maximum potential - to reach the ultimate goal: allowing the hooves and body to rehabilitate in harmony.

The ideal situation during the transition period is of course no discomfort at all, because should there be discomfort then the natural desire for balance and dispersion of pain will immediately bring the compensation factor into play and thus the whole vicious circle begins all over again. The Equine Touch™ in this situation is an excellent tool to use in conjunction with a non-invasive trim and as part of positive teamwork, because 'anything affects everything'. 🙏

About the authors:

Jock Ruddock, who pioneered The Equine Touch, and his veterinarian wife, Ivana Ruddock, have turned the Equine Touch into a discipline that is now recognized and applauded by all who see or use it, including veterinarians throughout Europe. The Equine Touch, a rebalancing, retraining, and some would say healing modality for the horse, is the first non-diagnostic, non-invasive, energy and connective soft-tissue discipline in the world to be awarded national accreditation status in the United Kingdom. Visit www.theequinetouch.com.