



## Wounds

### What should you do if your horse sustains a wound?

Wounds can occur at any site on your horse's body (as we know they like to get themselves into mishaps!). The management of different wounds will depend on their size, part of the body, other tissue(s) involved (not just the skin) and how long ago they happened.

### Small Superficial skin wounds on the body

Generally speaking most superficial skin wounds on the body that are only skin deep/grazes will heal very well if kept clean. Application of mild antiseptic creams can be helpful to protect the wound – in most cases we would only use mild products such as sudocream or derma gel (which forms a protective barrier) so that the skin and underlying tissue don't become irritated which prevents healing. Cleaning with saline solution/salt water is best rather than hibiscrub as this can actually be detrimental to the healing of wounds.

### Wounds to the limbs

We would ask that you contact your vet for wounds to the limbs. There are many places on horses' limbs where even small innocuous wounds can be very close to joints/tendon structures etc. and may not be as deep as you think. Generally speaking, wounds on the limbs should be bandaged with a light non-adherent dressing (e.g. melolin), padded layers (such as Soffban/Gamgee) and vet wrap in order to keep them clean and allow the wound to heal. If you are able to place a dressing on a wound prior to the vet examining your horse then this will help to minimise any contamination of the wound.

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The above wounds were both near joints. However the smaller wound to the fetlock (picture on the right) was communicating with the fetlock joint and therefore this joint needed flushing surgically and suturing closed. The picture on the left shows a larger wound to the carpus ('knee') which wasn't communicating with the joint but needed careful wound management using Manuka honey dressings and debridement/wound flushing in order to stop the formation of proud flesh. When the skin cannot be sutured (as per the picture on the left) we can usually help the skin edges of the wound to contract and close over the defect with careful wound management using dressings, minimising infection and movement.

### **How can we stop proud flesh?**

'Proud flesh' is called excessive granulation tissue. This is the tissue of the wound bed which is deeper to the skin. There are a few reasons why it may develop:

- Infection
- Poor blood supply (common in the lower limbs)
- Excessive movement – especially if it is near a joint

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- Horses/ponies with reduced immune system (e.g. Cushings disease or on steroid medication for conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease/equine asthma).
- As a consequence of cellulitis (skin sloughing from infection and reduced blood supply).

Treating proud flesh will depend on how much has formed and where it is located. As a general rule infected tissue/excess tissue is surgically debrided (removed) from the wound. Manuka honey dressings and steroid cream (with a good supportive bandage) can be used to aid healing and reduce the recurrence of further proud flesh on the wound. Treatment with a class IV laser can reduce proud flesh and improve wound healing in lower limb wounds. Larger wounds may need skin grafts (small skin punches) taken from the neck region that can be implanted into the wound bed to encourage new skin growth over the defect.



This proud flesh formed as a consequence of cellulitis (infection in the layers of the skin). Reduced blood supply and severe infection caused the skin to slough away in the areas now covered with proud flesh.

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## Larger wounds on the body



Although these can look very dramatic as you can see from the picture above left (wound to the side of the chest). These wounds will heal and contract very well (picture right). It is important to get these wounds assessed by a vet as if they are deep or near the chest cavity, we'll need to make sure that they don't communicate with the chest. Deep wounds in the armpit region are also culprits of this.

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## Wounds affecting the eyelids



A sutured upper eyelid wound. The green stain shows an ulcer affecting the surface of the eye (cornea).

Wounds to the eyelids are best seen as soon as possible to repair them. Lacerations that affect the contour of the eyelids will affect the health of the eye long term if the eyelids do not function properly/scar tissue irritates the surface of the eye (causing ulceration of the eye surface). These wounds can be sutured with small absorbable suture material under sedation and local anaesthetic blocks. If your horse sustains a wound to the eye or eyelid, then please call your vet as soon as possible.

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