



I arrived late in the day. It was almost feeding time and the horses were all nestled inside for another night. Before I walked through the open barn door I smelled it, the unmistakable stench of thrush. Studies claim over 90% of domestic horses have an active infection in the pads of their feet...more commonly referred to as the frog. That may seem high but at least 90% of horses I meet with present frog health crisis in the form of thrush – some mild, some severe – and the smell in this barn agreed with statistics.

Thrush is at epidemic proportions in our horses and no one seems to notice! It's so common it's not recognized, or perhaps is accepted as normal. Many barns have bottles of chemical treatments on hand for the never ending battle of thrush. Some believe it is a 'wetness' disease and that there is no thrush in the desert. There IS...it is just presented a little differently. More importantly, every horse owner knows a lame horse or two. Maybe they own one. One common reason is the ever popular presence of Thrush!



Healthy Frog Pad
NO thrush despite
wet season



DIVOTS...Product of a
functioning foot with
healthy frog pad.
NO thrush here!!

How do you know it's thrush? (damaged and infected frog pads)

Thrush does not always present with black oozing 'goo'...but often has a very bad smell. While the black goo and half eaten frog pad is an advanced form (trench foot) there are moderate forms (athletes foot) that can wreak havoc on hoof health and negatively affect the body and behavior as a whole.

In early stages it begins with flaky, chalky sole with shiny black areas along the wall sole connection. Thrush can affect the frog in the collateral grooves and/or central sulcus, the bulbs, the white line and even the sole. It's similar to foot rot in cattle or sheep. It is not uncommon in many cases for secondary infections like 'greased heels' and 'rain rot' to be present.

What do you see?

When doing your daily cleaning and inspecting your horse's feet...YES that should be a daily chore for horses confined in small pastures or pens or stalls...what do you see? Is the foot the picture of health with a clean distinction between parts: wide, thick, calloused uniform frog pad that blend into wide, smooth heel bulbs – smooth, shiny non sticky soles – clear white line connections?

Or maybe you see some warning signs of an underachieving foot susceptible to thrush: chalky, flakey sole – tattered, black frog- deep crevices that trap manure and bedding? Torn or tattered frog and 'blubs'...which we refer to deflated bulbs.

NOTE: You should be able to press...with ALL your might with the pointy side of the hoof pick INTO your horses frog pad with very little give...much like a rubber stall mat would do. Try it on your horse

What can you do?



The first thing is recognize thrush is a symptom!

It is not something that a horse can 'catch' or come up with in one day. If your horse presents thrush...there is already an underlying problem in either diet, lifestyle or trim protocols. These could be factors predisposing your horse to thrush. A horse presenting thrush is and has been in chronic stress with a compromised immune system. The following could be reasons.

* The shape of the foot itself. The trim has a lot to do with whether or not a horse develops a deep seated thrush or an easily rectified temporary or seasonal condition. Overgrown or conventionally trimmed or shod feet are much more likely to develop thrush. This is due to the malformed hoof shape and

the accompanying poor circulation. A good barefoot trim...used in conjunction with diet and lifestyle, creates a self cleaning foot and promotes blood flow and function which helps eliminate thrush.

* A high sugar (alfalfa) or concentrate (processed feeds) diet encourages the growth of thrush – like acne of the foot. There are far too many horses over-supplemented with processed feeds/grains and other 'additives'. Feeding a staple diet of free choice grass hays improves health, not only of the foot but of the entire horse and as a lucky side effect also strengthens the immune system.

* Lack of movement. Stalled horses or horses in small turnout pens or paddocks are at a much higher risk. Urine is very concentrated, more so if the horse is fed grain/ concentrates. Bedding soaks up the caustic urine and returns it to the foot. This shows up in the sole as an orange or cantaloupe color. I call this urine burn, and it is usually accompanied by black, ragged, narrow frogs, dull, flat bulbs and a foul smell. Enhanced natural movement with a correct barefoot trim ensures better circulation, and with attention to footing and feeds, thrush will be a thing of the past.

Thrush Lives in HERE



Catherine Kats



Kari Bowser

The simple thing is thrush does not exist in a healthy functioning foot!

No matter how wet it is outside. Natural horses handle the wet seasons with the built-in protection that starts with a strong and healthy functioning immune system...which is directly related to healthy strong auxiliary heart pumps...the feet! Healthy functioning feet are shiny and not sticky. They have a thin shellac-like coating which helps the foot self clean and maintain a proper moisture balance, stay elastic and ward off invasions from the outer world.

To speed-treat thrush you can what I call the 'magic spray': active apple cider vinegar in a spray bottle with about 5 -10 drops of tea tree oil. Clean the feet well with a hoof pick and a steel brush. Remove any large tattered edges on the frog. Spray 2 to 3 times a day for at least 6 weeks. Make sure you get in the central sulcus of the frog as well as the collateral grooves. As a preventative measure, spray the foot daily. Be sure your treatment includes a proper barefoot trim and plenty of exercise to increase circulation and strengthen immunity. Remember, chronic thrush is much less likely to occur using a staple grass food for horses.

The ultimate goal is to prevent thrush. By treating now and taking new management approaches, you may never see thrush again.



Magic Spray and EQ
Trimming will help to rid your
horse of thrush...forever!



There is NO Thrush here!...but a
healthy dense strong wide frog pad

