

# 4 STEPS TO HEALTHY HOOVES

by SmartPak

Every rider has heard the saying “no hoof, no horse.” The quality of your horse’s hooves can be influenced by a number of factors, including these four key areas: regular professional maintenance, environmental management, exercise and activities, and proper nutrition.

## Why hoof health matters

There’s more to your horse’s hooves than meets the eye. Your horse’s outer hoof wall surrounds, protects, and supports bones, tendons, ligaments, cartilage, nerves, and an intricate vascular network. These vascular pathways — composed of arteries, veins, and capillaries — function as a key element in maintaining the health of the foot.

Weak, unhealthy hooves can cause a variety of problems, from unsightly chips, cracks, and crumbling, to unsoundness and discomfort. But healthy hooves take a long time to grow. That’s because just like our own fingernails, the hoof wall is mostly composed of dead tissue, so it can’t mend and heal. Instead, damaged sections have to be regrown and replaced, and because your horse’s hooves grow from the hairline down at an average rate of ¼” per month, completely growing out a healthy hoof wall can take up to a year! That’s why it’s a smart choice to support healthy hooves before your horse’s hooves show signs of weakness.



### 1. Regular, professional maintenance

In the artificial environments we provide, horses simply can’t maintain their hooves as they would in their natural environment, and poorly maintained hooves can have far-reaching effects. A long, unbalanced hoof will negatively impact your horse’s way of going, putting undue strain on the joints, tendons, and ligaments of the entire limb. So it’s important to think of hoof care as a major part of your horse’s overall health and wellbeing — after all, it’s called “horse shoeing,” not “hoof shoeing,” for a reason!

Whether your horse is barefoot or shod, working with a knowledgeable hoof care professional is essential to maintaining healthy, well-balanced hooves. And like most things in your horse’s life, consistency is key. That’s why the first step to supporting optimal hoof health is finding a hoof care professional you trust, setting up a regular maintenance schedule, and sticking to it!

### 2. Environmental management

Your horse’s hoof is equipped to manage natural, gradual fluctuations in moisture. However, between the barn, the pasture, the ring, and the trails, you’d be surprised at how many times your horse’s hooves go from wet to dry and dry to wet every day. Unfortunately, frequent shifts from one environment to the other can cause the hoof wall to rapidly expand and contract, which may lead to cracks and other structural problems.

In order to help your horse put his best foot forward, try to limit changes in moisture level as much as possible. For additional support, try a topical that actually helps stabilize moisture levels in the hoof, like a hoof hardener or a hoof gel instead of turning to a standard hoof moisturizer.

### 3. Exercise and Activity

You probably know that turnout and exercise have many benefits for your horse, but did you know that one of the benefits is supporting hoof health?

Your horse’s hoof surrounds, protects, and supports bones, tendons, ligaments, cartilage, nerves, and an intricate vascular network. These vascular pathways — composed of arteries, veins, and capillaries — function as a key element in maintaining the health of the foot. That’s because the strength of the equine foot depends on nourishment provided by good circulation. By supporting healthy circulation, you’re ensuring nutrient-rich blood is pumping throughout the foot.

But how do you support healthy circulation? That’s where exercise and activity come in! In order to promote good blood flow, the frog and the solar (bottom) surface of the foot need to be engaged — in other words, your horse needs to get moving! Research



shows horses in nature graze and move for approximately 17 hours per day, but modern horsekeeping often results in much less activity than that. Maximizing your horse’s turnout time and space is a great first step, but if time and/or space are limited — or your horse is a lazy pasture puff — consider looking for opportunities to up his exercise, including lunging, hot-walking, trail riding, etc.

### 4. Proper nutrition

Nutrition is another area of hoof health that can’t be ignored. Proper nutrition plays a vital role in helping your horse maintain healthy, resilient hooves, which is why daily support from a supplement is a smart way to support healthy hooves all year long.

Biotin is vital to the growth of strong, healthy hooves due to its role in collagen formation. Research has shown that supplementing with 10–30 mg of biotin per day may help promote growth rate and integrity in poor quality hooves. In addition to biotin, look for supplements that provide the amino acids critical to hoof health. Lysine, methionine, and threonine — which play a vital role in the formation of hoof structures — are essential amino acids, meaning that your horse can’t make them on his own and needs to get them from his diet.

Minerals like copper and zinc have also been shown to support healthy hoof growth and help keep hooves strong. Lastly, remember how in step 3 we talked about the importance of healthy circulation? Well, you can support circulation from the inside, too! Look for a supplement that has ingredients to support blood flow and vascularity, like the amino acid arginine and the B vitamin niacinamide.

## Give your horse the solid foundation he deserves

Now that you know four ways that you can help support your horse’s hoof health, take time to protect and maintain them, rather than waiting until there is a problem later. SmartPak offers resources and tips with additional ways to support your horse’s feet at [www.SmartPak.com](http://www.SmartPak.com)

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