



Equine Newsletter Christmas 2020



Hock lameness

SUMMERLEAZE
FARM & EQUINE VETS



The hock situated between the foot and the stifle is one of the most complex and hardest working joints in the equine skeleton and is the equivalent of the human ankle. The horse's hock is composed of six bones, four joints and numerous tendons and ligaments. The largest joint at the top of the hock is known as the tarsocrural or tibiotarsal joint. This is the articulation between the tibia and the talus. The other three joints are situated below this joint and are much smaller. They are the proximal intertarsal, distal intertarsal and tarsometatarsal joints as shown below:



For practical purposes, the hock works as a hinge, moving by flexion and extension through one plane. Practically all of the movement occurs in the tibiotarsal joint. Movement in the other joints is minimal, restricted by the shape of the articular surfaces of the bones themselves, the collateral ligaments and the strong fibrous joint capsule. A special anatomical arrangement exists between the stifle and the hock, which allows them to work in synchrony with each other – when the stifle flexes, the hock flexes, when one extends, so does the other.

All equine disciplines require full and free flexion of both the stifle and hock joints to achieve effective hind limb propulsion. Whether it is the acceleration necessary in racing or the collection of dressage, the hock is the pivotal hind limb joint.

Even at slow gaits, the demands we place on ridden horses are far beyond the normal physiological stresses placed on horses in the wild and because of these stresses, and strains, hock injuries are common. Although the hind legs are not subjected to the same concussive force of weight bearing as the front legs, the loading on them during movement is still significant. Shock waves travel up the limb and through the bones, ligaments and joint capsules that collectively make up the hock. In addition, the break over phase of the stride produces a rotational force (torque) that is also absorbed by the structures of the hock. The absorption of these forces is the reason why the hock is the most common site in the hind limb of work (stress) related injuries.

These injuries can range from serious career ending problems to mild chronic issues that can be easily managed.

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Hock problems – spavin explained

There are several different types of injuries associated with the hock area. One of the most common being a bone spavin. This term describes osteoarthritis of the lower hock joints – tarsometatarsal and distal intertarsal joints which may or may not be associated with hard bony lumps felt on the horse's leg at that level.

The fact that there are many different choices for treatment of bone spavin indicates that no one treatment is 100% effective in all cases.

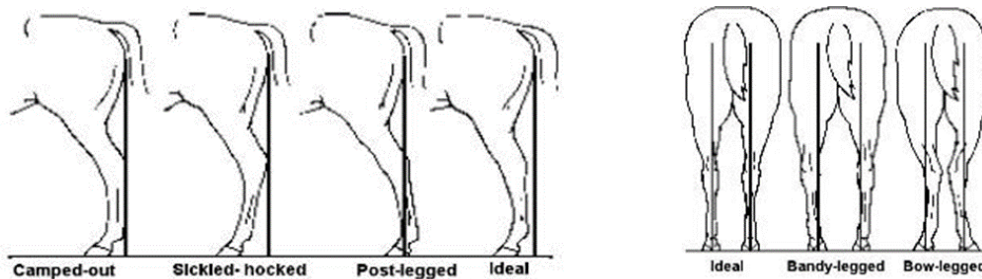
However, ridden horses can be managed successfully and continue to compete at a high level.

Bone spavin should not be confused with bog spavin although they sound similar, they are different conditions and can have completely different causes.

Bog spavin is a clinical sign rather than a diagnosis and can occur as a result of a number of disease conditions including osteoarthritis, osteochondrosis or synovitis (inflammation within the joint).

Is conformation important in the formation of hock problems?

Certain hock conformations can predispose horses to hock injuries with the most common conformational issues, upright hocks, sickle hocks and cow hocks resulting in lameness:



What problems can they cause?

Upright hocks

Many warmbloods have particularly upright hocks – a problem that can leave those affected not only at risk of hock injuries but also of upward fixation of the patella, suspensory desmitis and fetlock osteoarthritis.

Sickle hocks

Horses with sickle hocks – where the lower hindlimb is well ahead of the vertical increases the load on the back of the hock. This conformational fault may predispose the horse to distal hock joint pain and to curb formation.

Cow hocks

Horses having cow hock conformation or inward rotation of the hocks such that a straight line cannot be drawn down the horse's limb when viewed from behind. A mild degree of cow hock conformation is common and not necessarily associated with lameness. Severe cases of cow hock conformation and those with angular limb deformity may predispose a horse to lameness while those with a combination of sickle hocks and cow hocks are also at greater risk.

Next month we will look at the treatment of hock conditions at Summerleaze Farm and Equine Vets and three cases that have been through the equine clinic recently.

Equine Enrichment

At this time of the year it can be hard to see your horses in daylight and to keep them entertained, here are some of our ideas to keep them busy in their quiet time, some of which Santa may be able to help with!

Mirrors - Stable mirrors can be comforting for some horses but it is important to buy ones that are shatterproof and ensure any put up in your stable are secure to prevent any injuries to your horse. It is also important to not place the mirror directly next to where the horse is fed, as some horses can get aggressive to the "other horse" they can see in the mirror around their food.



Treat balls - A fantastic way of keeping your horse entertained but do remember all treats contain calories, so it is important to deduct this from their feed for those who are already in good condition.

Scratching mat - Attaching an old broom head or a scratching mat inside a stable can help horses to relieve that unreachable itch, they also help reduce stress. However, they are not advisable for horses who will itch to the point of self-trauma.



Music - Having classical music on in the background has been shown to lower a horse's heart rate.

Reading - Reading aloud to your horse can also be a way of bonding with the horse and creating a distraction for them.

Exercise - Ridden and lunging work may not be possible in the worse weather depending on your facilities but in hand work over poles and logs and between obstacles can be a great way to keep your horse mentally active and help stop them stiffening up. Carrot stretches in the stable can also help.

Companionship - Depending on your set up it may be possible to lower stable walls or allow your horse access to a coral during the day with the ability to reach other horses if turn out is not possible. Being able to mutually groom and interact with their friends can help keep your horse happy.



Food - If your horse is out or in a larger indoor space it may be possible to split their forage over numerous piles encouraging them to move. You can also give them branches from edible trees such as willow or birch to give them something to chew on. Different treats and herbs can also be feed for enrichment but be aware of everything in moderation and to check that it is not toxic.

Thank you

It's been a difficult year for all of us and we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting us in our Covid protocols

Christmas Present Idea



Summerleaze Calendar
for 2021 is now available
£5 each



Available from Reception



Summerleaze Vets
Christmas & New Year Opening Hours

Christmas Eve
8am till 4pm

Christmas Day
Closed - Emergencies Only

Boxing Day
Closed - Emergencies Only

New Year's Eve
8am till 4pm

New Year's Day
Closed - Emergencies Only

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**Wishing all our client's, a very Happy Christmas and a healthy
New Year**

PLEASE rest assure that we have dedicated Farm and Equine vets on call for emergencies throughout the festive season. People often say "I wasn't sure if it was an emergency or not" - the easy answer is, if you are worried enough to think "I might need the vet" then call - we would rather speak to you or see your animal if you are concerned, than not see it!