



There may be a number of occasions when you will need to bandage your horse's legs. Bandaging can be used for protection, support and injury. Correct leg bandaging is essential - applied incorrectly, bandages may cause discomfort, restrict blood flow and even cause injury. Learning the correct bandaging techniques can save your horse from potential damage.

Protection and Support - When do I need to use bandages?

Domestic horses have to deal with the unbalancing effects of a rider and perform movements, eg circles, lateral work and jumping, which increase the chance of your horse knocking itself. Your horse's natural movements or conformation defects may also result in it inflicting damage, especially if it is shod. Fitting leg protection is advisable, especially when competing over fences.

What sort of bandages can I use?

Bandages tend to offer better support than any alternatives as they conform well to the leg, they do, however, take practice to put on correctly. Types of bandages include:

- **Exercise bandages:** these require a layer of padding underneath them, eg gamgee, foam or pads. The bandages are made from a stretchy crepe-like material for support and protection of the leg from the fetlock up to the knee. Care must be taken not to apply these too tightly.
- **Stable bandages:** these are slightly wider than exercise bandages and are usually made of thicker wool-type material. They have some give but are not stretchy like the exercise bandages. They are also designed to support and protect the leg from the coronet up to the knee or hock.
- **Tail bandages:** these are made from similar material to exercise bandages. Tail bandages are mainly used to protect the tail while travelling. They can also be used to smooth the top of the tail before a show.

How do I apply a bandage?

- Make sure the legs and bandages are clean and dry. If there is a wound, make sure it has been cleaned, rinsed and dressed according to your vet's recommendations.
- Always stand to the side of the leg, facing the hindquarters, when applying or removing bandages or boots.
- Apply an inch or more of soft, clean padding so it lies flat and wrinkle-free against the skin, this will protect the leg beneath the bandage.
- Start the bandage at the inside of the cannon bone, above the fetlock joint. Do not begin or end bandaging over a joint, movement may loosen the bandage and cause it to come undone.
- The bandage should be applied in a spiral pattern, working down the leg, from front to back (counterclockwise on left legs, clockwise on right legs), and up again, overlapping the each layer by approximately 50%.
- Half an inch of the padding should remain visible at the top and bottom. If there is a potential problem with bedding or debris getting into the bandage, seal the openings with a loose wrap of flexible adhesive bandage.
- Use smooth, even pressure on the bandage to compress the padding. Make sure no lumps or bumps form beneath the bandage.
- Be careful not to bandage the legs too tightly, creating pressure points and eventual damage.
- Avoid applying bandages too loosely, they will not provide the support needed and may become a source of danger/injury, especially when travelling.
- Leg padding and bandages should extend to below the coronet band of the hoof for protection, especially when travelling.

Are there any alternatives?

For daily exercise, boots are easier to fit and keep clean. Boots can be made from various materials, eg felt, leather, neoprene and plastic. Some boots have a shock-absorbing lining of either rubber or sheepskin. They also have various fastenings, eg buckle, hook and eye, velcro. The back pair of boots will be slightly longer, with 4 or 5 straps compared to 2 or 3 on the front pair - all the straps should secure backwards and the pressure should be even. It is, however, very important that the right size boot is fitted

Bandaging - the do's and don't's



to the front legs so they do not interfere with the knee joint. Types include:

- **Brushing boot:** this is the most commonly used boot which protects the lower leg from just below the knee to above the fetlock. Some brushing boots have built-in tendon guards.
- **Fetlock boot:** this is a shorter boot which protects the fetlock joint from brushing injuries.
- **Hock boot:** this is used when travelling and only protects the hock joint.
- **Knee boot:** used when travelling and while being ridden, the knees are protected in the event of a fall.
- **Over-reach boot:** this protects the heels of the front feet from being trodden on by the back feet.
- **Tendon boot:** for use when jumping or galloping. The boot protects the tendons from being cut by the hind feet.
- **Travelling boot:** this offers padded protection from above the knee to below the coronet on the front legs and from above the hock to below the coronet on the back legs. Shorter versions are also available, but all travelling boots should come below the coronet to protect against over-reaching.

Wounds - When do I need to use bandages?

The reasons for placing a pad and bandage over a wound are to provide protection, ensuring a clean environment on the wound and to provide general support to tissues surrounding the wound. Bandaging of lower leg wounds generally reduces the formation of granulation tissue or proud flesh.

When a wound is in a high-motion area, eg over a joint, an appropriate pad and bandage will create some degree of immobility that can increase the chance of a primary repair being successful. These bandages can be difficult to apply, especially to the hind leg and they tend to slip with leg motion. If in doubt, call your vet.

What sort of bandages can I use?

Suitable bandages for first aid are usually a plaster bandage with an adhesive surface or a cotton crepe bandage. The wound should be covered in gauze before bandaging. DO NOT use cotton wool - small fibres will collect in the wound and act as a foreign body, therefore slowing down the healing process. If in doubt, call your vet.

What else do I need to know?

Your horse's tail may also need bandaging at some stage, eg for travelling purposes or rectal/vaginal examinations. If this is the case, once again you must be sure that the bandage is not applied too tightly as blood flow problems can occur, in extreme cases over-tight tail bandages can lead to the death of the lower part of the tail and the subsequent need to amputate part of the tail. If a tail bandage needs to be left on for a long period of time, it should be monitored and changed regularly.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your horse please contact Hampden Veterinary Hospital on 01296 423666 and we will be happy to advise you.