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Horse's love it when their owner's understand them.

Horsemanship is about the horse teaching you about yourself.

### The Amazing Horse Hoof

\* I have linked all pictures on this page, so click on any picture for more information \*



The hoof is simply amazing in that it does so much, is so important and without it the horse does not live. This is why the old saying "No Hoof - No Horse" has been around for years. Taking care of and understanding the hoof is paramount to good horsemanship and providing proper care for your horse. I am not a Farrier or a horse shoer, but I know the importance of taking care of a horse's feet. I am putting this page together to help educate you on the hoof

\*Photos Rick and Horses

\*Clinics on Request\*

\*Contact Rick

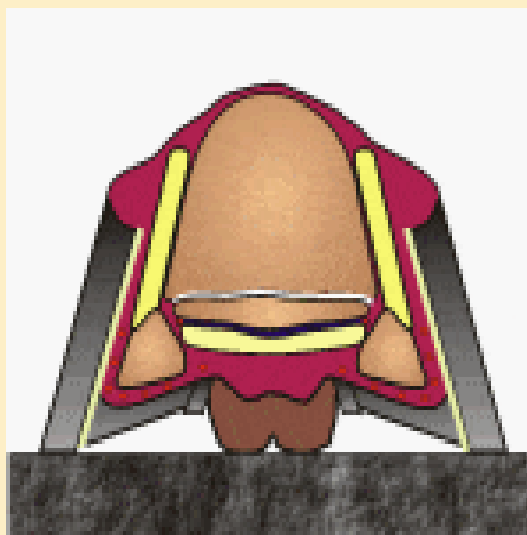


Think Like A Horse  
By: Rick Gore

[Move to top of page](#)

and the importance of proper hoof care.

The picture below shows the natural flexing, movement and how blood flow occurs with a bare foot hoof. **A shod hoof cannot move like this, cannot grow or develop strength.** How can anyone not see the damage nails and steel shoes do to a hoof?



The picture above is a great example of the working hoof and how it supports weight and flexes as a horse walks and moves and how this action increases blood flow and keeps the hoof healthy. All of these actions helps provide the horse with padding and shock absorption for the hoof and legs. Which is why stalling (putting a horse in a stall) is very unhealthy for the horse and causes a lot of hoof and leg problems.

#### Pros to Barefoot Hooves:

A healthy foot does not need shoes for protection

The hoof flexes naturally

Hoof grows normally

Blood flow is increased

Greater traction from the hoof expansion and flattening out

Better shock absorption

The digital cushion is allowed to assisting in shock absorption and blood flow

The frog gets pressure assisting in blood flow

#### Cons to Shod Hooves:

Horseshoes restrict blood flow

Shoes numb the foot from lack of blood (this is why horses go lame when shoes are removed)

No hoof expansion with a shoe

Hoof flexing is prevented

Shoes on a hoof is like putting a clamp on a hose

Many forms of lameness are linked to shoes

Shoes change and affect the coffin bone and prevent the frog from functioning

A shod hoof loses 60 to 80% of the hoof's natural shock absorption

Shoes cause three times the pounding force and pressure to the hoof

The picture below will take you to a Youtube video that shows an actual horse hoof that has been removed and shows the flexing and blood flow of the hoof. **\*\*Graphic Images\*\*** The video is excellent to show what happens every time a horse takes a step. This also shows how a horse shoe stops this flexing action, prevents blood flow and does the hoof harm; yet people



are still stuck on putting shoes on horses. Although the video is not in English, it is worth watching.

Here Is Link To the Video [Click Here to Watch](#)



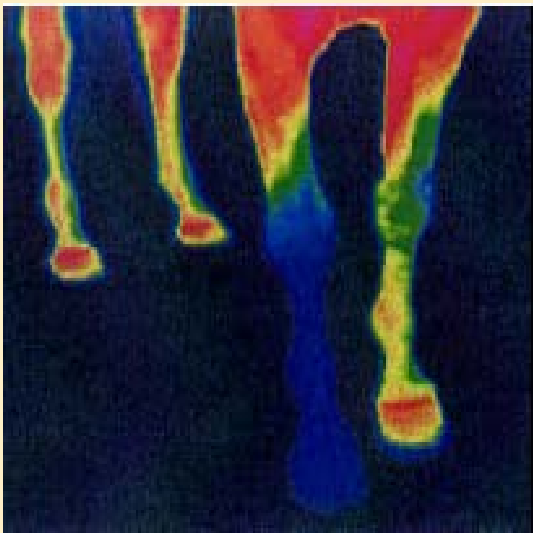
My [Horse Anatomy Page](#) has many more photos of the hoof so go there for more photos.

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### **Proof Positive Why Shoes Are Bad for Horses:**

In the picture below you see a **thermograph photo of a horse**, which shows blood flow, heat and circulation of the legs and hooves. YOU guess what foot has a shoe and which three do not have shoes? The photo is linked to a web page with the following quote: *"The single most convincing thing for me was to see a thermograph of a horse's feet--three of which were without shoes and one which was shod. **Note the shod foot has virtually no blood circulation.** I will **NEVER** put shoes on my horse again."*

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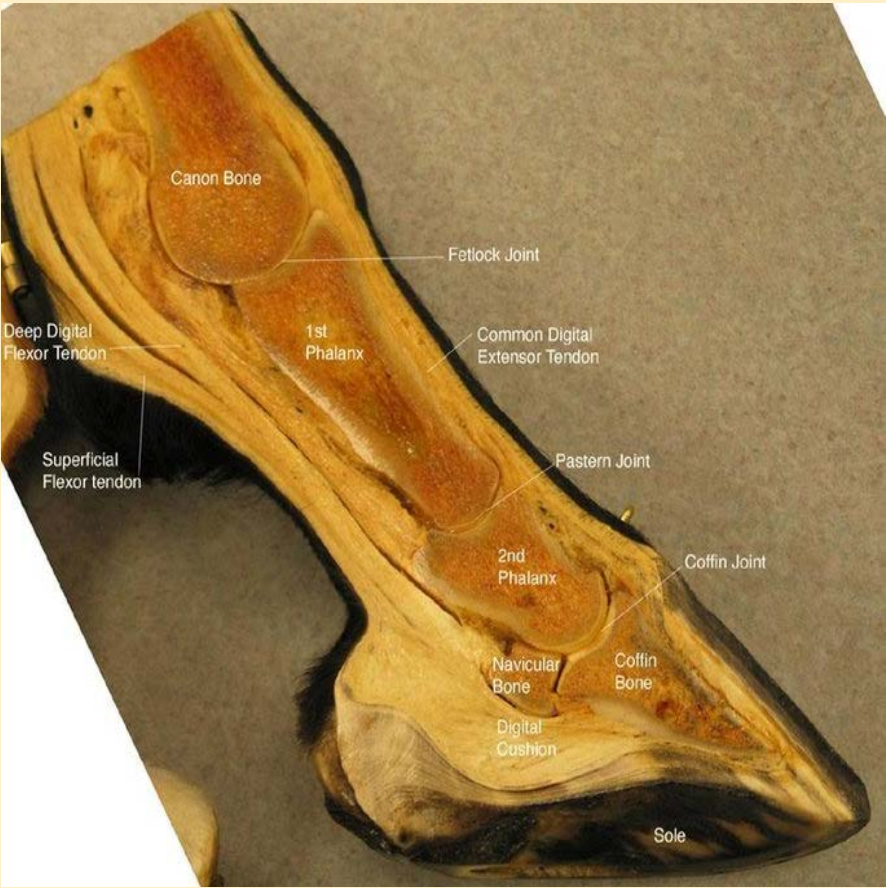
**NOTE:** In 1983, Luca Bein, did a dissertation on the shock absorption of a barefoot hoof compared to a shod hoof. His finding were that **a conventionally shod hoof loses 60 to 80% of the hoof's natural shock absorption.** Bein also demonstrated that a shod hoof on asphalt, at a walk, receives **THREE TIMES (3X)** the impact force as as a **barefoot hoof on asphalt at the trot.** Bein found a shoe on a hoof vibrates at about 800 Hertz (Hz), which at that level does damage to living tissue. *Think about that, a metal shoe that is nailed into a healthy hoof compromises the hoof wall, triples the impact force of every step, prevents blood flow, damages living tissue, prevents expansion of the hoof, restricts the natural flexing of the hoof, prevents normal growth of the hoof and yet people still put shoes on horses.*

**REMEMBER:** You can trot your horse barefoot on pavement and do three times LESS damage than walking your shod horse on pavement.

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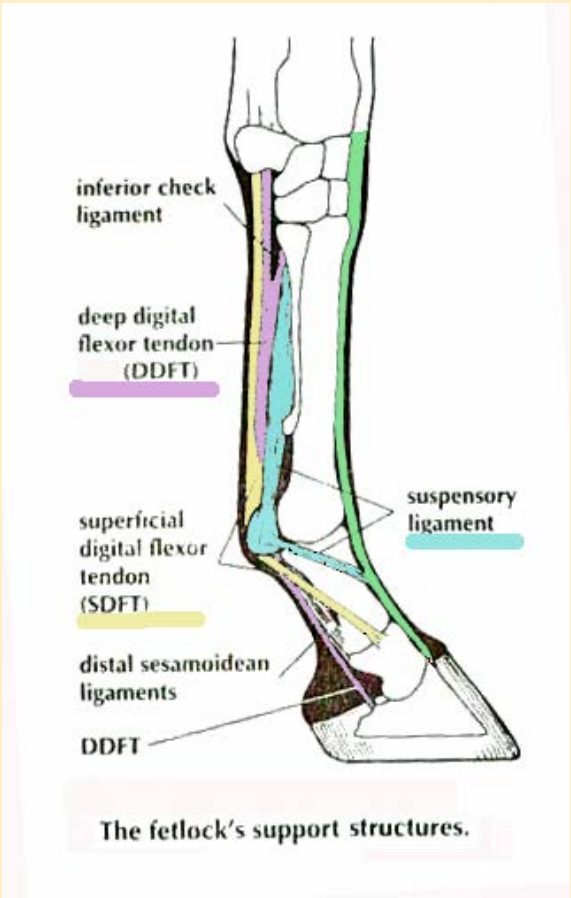
Here is a good article and explanation of the hoof called [Guided Tour - Horse Hoof Anatomy](#). This has good information and pictures about the horse's hoof.

The picture below is a horse hoof and leg cut in half with parts labeled. If you click on the picture it will open a pdf file on [Hoof Care](#), it is a large file and may take a while to download, but worth the read.



**The Hoof Suspensory System:**

In the photo below you will see more of the complex support system for the horse's leg and hoof. Clicking on the photo will take you a good site with lots of good information about the hoof.



**Understanding Hoof Care:**

Like many things in horses, **"it is a process and not an event"**, so trying to fix a hoof or correct a horse in one trimming just makes matters worse. It takes a full year, thereabout, for a hoof to grow out completely. Another old horse saying is **"the hoof you care for today - is the hoof you will ride on in a year"**. This means that when horses are neglected and are not given proper hoof care, it cannot be fixed in one or two trimmings. It takes time and **"if you take the time it takes - it will take less time"**. So I see and hear people and Farriers claim to fix a hoof in one trim, it just ain't so and can't be done. You can start in the right direction; you can relieve pain, balance the hoof, start the repair process, but no hoof is fixed or made perfect in one trimming.

However, you can ruin a hoof in one trimming very easily. Which is why it is so important that you understand the mechanics of the hoof and know how it works, so you don't buy into that foolishness that is being repeated throughout the horse world, mainly by people that don't know and people "that have owned horses their entire life". Two horse sayings that fit here: **"If you take the time it takes, it will take less time"** and **"The slow way is the fast way with horses."**

**Reference Glue on Shoes:**

This is a new thing and is better than nailing metal shoes to the hoof wall and punching holes in the hoof wall with nails, which compromises the hoof wall, punctures the sealed hoof wall and subjects the Horse hoof to infection, abscess or bacteria. The next time you see a Farrier take off an old shoe from a horse, pay close attention to the hoof. Look at how the wall is dead about the nails, look at the rotting type action that occurs about the nails and where the metal shoe has restricted growth and blood flow. If you look closely, it is very easy to see how unhealthy the hoof is because of the shoe. However, with a fresh trim, some nipper work, some file work and a shinny shoe, the hoof looks all pretty again. What people don't see is the rotting and damage that just starts over until the next change of shoes.



Shoes and nails still restrict the natural flexing, expanding and contraction of the hoof. It still puts unnecessary pressure on the hoof wall, still puts unnatural pressure on the hoof and still makes the hoof weaker in the long term, since it does not allow for natural and normal growth, blood flow and strength. So once again, trying to do something to improve or help a horse still goes against the natural growth and hoof development and ends up doing more damage than letting Mother Nature do what it does best. Barefoot is best.

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### **"Horse Shoes Are Bad For Horses"**

Basic hoof care is not that hard, but it takes time. So trying to rush it or force it only makes it take longer. Like most things with horses, "the slow way is the fast way". So just picking the feet regularly really is a great way to prevent and spot problems. Picking the feet does many things that people don't see. It teaches a horse to have his feet handled, it forces you to spend time with your horse, it develops muscles in your back which will help your riding, it shows dominance over the horse since you move his feet up and down and take away his ability to flee or run and most importantly it trains your EYE.

Training your eye is a process not an event. It takes years of seeing good and bad hooves to know what is normal and what is not. A trained eye is something that needs to be constantly refreshed. The eye is trained over years and years of looking at good and bad hooves. Seeing hooves daily helps you know what looks normal and what looks odd or out of place. This is how the eye gets trained. Which is why the misconception is alive and well that horseshoes are good? Since many use shoes and have always seen shoes on horses, they think that is normal. It is not and it is not good for the horse. I am linking many hoof sites to this page. Visit these sites and view all the pictures of good and bad hooves, train your eye to you know what you are seeing and what to look for. This is not something people naturally have or comes without work; they have to learn it. If you just look at your horse's feet, you will never understand the hoof. It takes 1000's of hooves to start being able to recognize good from bad. Some hoof chips are insignificant while others are very critical. Knowing the difference can save your horse lots of problems. So invest time viewing and reading all you can about the hoof. Watch Farriers work on feet, ask questions, notice the hoof before the trim and after the trim. This, like most all things with horses, is not easy and is not fast. If you invest on the front end you will save much more time and effort later and it will be better for your horse.

Another common misconception out there is that all hooves should look the same. This is not true; all hooves are rarely exactly same. Each hoof can be a little different; trimming all hooves the same can cause problems. If a Farrier or horse shoer is making your horse's hooves look the same, then he is not doing your horse or you any favors. There are certain aspects of a hoof that mainly deal with "balance". Balance is important in many ways, but absolute uniformity is not the same as a well balanced hoof. If you view the links I have placed on the pictures and at the bottom of this page you will start to see what balance is and will hear this common theme from horse hoof experts.

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### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE HOOF AND BAREFOOT TRIMS:**

A horse walks about seven to eight thousand steps a day in Pasture. A horse only walks less than 600 steps a day in a stall. This has negative consequences to blood flow, wear, exercise, flexing, frog stimulation and preventing all that is not good for the hoof.

Everything your horse eats will affect the feet. Some, such as excess sugars, grains and any toxins will have a very negative effect, while a well balanced diet will be beneficial to help keep the hoof health. Minerals, such as copper and zinc are essential for good hoof health. Too much iron is NOT good for the hoof. Although a mineral block and salt block is important, they may not provide everything needed.

Clean water and hydration helps the hoof. Having clean cool water in summer and warm water in winter helps a horse drink more and that is good for the hoof.

Hoof care and trimming are very important to a healthy hoof. Regular trimming keeps the hoof stronger, more balanced, shaped correctly and pressure points are reduced by keeping the hoof appearing flat, but actually level by smoothing off any lumps or bumps in the sole.

Laminitis is inflammation in the hoof. In my experience, Laminitis and abscesses are the most common form of hoof issues. So keep in mind, adequate exercise, proper diet, clean water and correct trimming will create and encourage a healthy hoof.

Remember: The front hooves carry more weight and pressure than the rear. Front hooves pull and back hooves push. Notice in the picture below how this happens.



You can Click on the above Picture to go to [SoftTouch Natural Horse Care Site](#)

With this in mind, front hooves hit the ground harder and have more impact. Using easy boots or other type boot on the front feet is beneficial if you are riding on rocky or hard terrain, working longer or harder, or if the horse has been kept on soft or wet terrain making the hoof softer. A healthy hoof should not need boots.

**TWO KEY BAREFOOT TRIMMING POINTS:** Rounding the hoof edge, commonly called a Mustang roll, helps prevent chips and increases hoof strength. SCOOPING, putting a slight scoop on the sides or quarters of the hoof, helps aid in flexing of the hoof when the horse walks. Here is two pictures of a scooped hoof, notice the raised portion of the hoof. When pressure is placed on the hoof, the front and rear hoof flattens and the scoop allows for flexing.



**NOTE:** You will NOT see scooping on a shod hoof (a horse with shoes), since shoes prevent flexing or expanding of the hoof, which is why Shoes are Bad for horses.

#### **WARNING ON HOOF CONDITIONERS:**

Hoof oils, lotions, conditions or treatments can do more damage than good - if over used. These things soften the hooves. Using them one or twice a month may be OK, but NOT sure they are beneficial. Using them any more will harm and make the hoof weak, slows growth, increases chipping and compromises a healthy hoof.

#### **DON'T OVER USE HOOF TREATMENTS.**



I got a question about how do horses in the wild get rocks out of their feet if no one picks them out. In the wild horses walk more, the run more, they get drinks in mud and ponds, they cross streams, and all of these things help remove objects from the hoof. When a horse kicks out at another horse or predator, that snapping action removes things from hooves. When a horse stands or walks in mud, that suction removes things from the hoof. When mud dries in a hoof and then when the horse runs, that dried mud flies off and pulls things from the hoof. When a horse paws with his front feet, that action helps remove things from the hoof. The more things we keep natural the better it is for the horse.

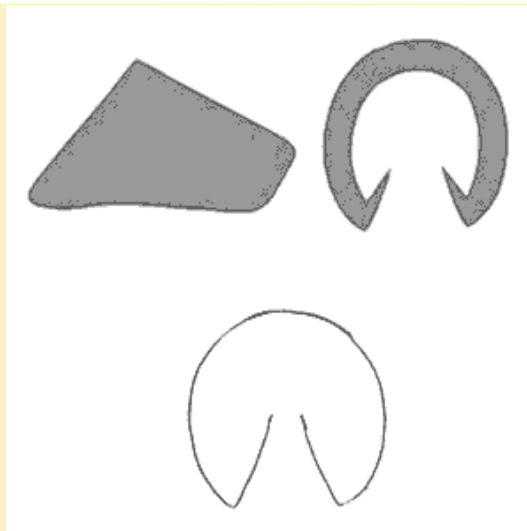
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### My Advice for Basic Hoof Care

If I had to tell someone in 50 words or less how to care for a horse's hooves here is what I say and what I believe. Pick the feet daily, spray a bleach mix once a week, learn how to use a rasp (file) so you can do a light "mustang roll" once every two weeks on your horse's feet, round off and smooth out chips and cracks until your Farrier or trimmer comes out, watch your Farrier trim your horse(s), learn what the hoof looks like before the trim and after the trim and ask questions from your Farrier. Be involved and study what your horse's feet look like after their trim. If you trim yourself "less is more." Always trim less; you will not do damage or harm if you remove too little. You WILL do damage if you remove too much. My basic rules for hoof trimming are; the sole and hoof wall should be about the same level. I do not trim or remove sole unless I see a lump or uneven spot, otherwise I let the natural removal take place as the hoof flexes and is walked on. I roll the edges of the hoof wall to make it stronger and help prevent cracks and chips. I rasp the hoof once every two weeks to remove small amounts of growth, chips or flares. I take off the bars but I do not take them too low - about even with the sole but better a little higher than the sole then too low. Length of the hoof is not the main issue, level, balanced and hoof wall and sole as one is key for me.

#### Some do's and don'ts when it comes to Hoof Care / Maintenance:

Don't over use conditioners and hoof dressings. Using these products too much interferes with the natural hoof development. It can make the hoof soft causing more damage, chipping and soreness. Don't remove too much when filing with a rasp. Don't use trimmers (nippers) this makes it too easy to remove too much hoof wall and if you are caring for the feet regularly, then you will not need nippers. A light rasping once a week or every two weeks will keep the hoof stable and will not create large changes in the hoof, like what happens when you just have your horse's feet trimmed once every six or eight weeks. Keep a bleach mix (3/4 water - 1/4 bleach) in a spray bottle and spray in the hoof (frog area) after you pick the feet, about once every week or so. Do not do this everyday unless you smell a foul odor coming from the frog area when you pick the feet. If a foul odor is present, you can use this bleach every day but do not use it for over 4 or 5 days in a row since it will kill good bacteria if used too much or too often. And lastly, **NO SHOES**. Shoes are bad for horses, and transfer pounding and shock waves up the hoof, bones, tendons and legs. Shoes stop the natural movement and expansion of the hoof. In the picture below you can see the horse move naturally with NO SHOES. Nailing a non-movable metal shoe to a hoof stops and prevents this natural and needed movement. This movement is needed for blood flow and to keep a hoof healthy. Notice the hoof flexes many ways (front to back, side to side and flat), all stopped by shoes.



If you are switching to barefoot from shoes, give it time. The horse may be a little sore at first. Too many people want to say they tried barefoot and they took shoes off for one month and the horse was sore, so they went back to shoes. This is typical horse people wanting everything too fast and always in a hurry. It takes a hoof a full year to grow out. After years of putting nails and metal on the hoof and after all these years of screwing up the hoof, people want the hoof to adjust overnight to barefoot. "The slow way is the fast way;" give it time. There are many things to consider when going from shoes to barefoot.

Things that could matter are time of year, type of ground, how the horse is kept (stall or pasture), how the horse is used or ridden, how bad the hooves are, how the Farrier took off shoes, how the Farrier trimmed the horse and many other factors. So don't expect overnight results and plan to have a few problems for a year until the hoof has had time to adjust to a natural hoof. Another thing is, if your Farrier wants or tells you that your horse needs shoes, don't have them trim your horse barefoot, they can make the horse lame and sore so they can be right and then tell you that "they told you so." Then they get to convince you that your horse needs shoes or has bad feet. Expect your horse to get sore and may limp a little; that is normal. If you break your leg and get your cast off, you will still limp. The hoof may get sore after a ride since the hoof has never supported your weight or his weight without shoes. This will strain the hoof at first until it has time to grow and get strong. Do not take the shoes off, ride like you normally do, run the crap out of your horse, or jump and do all the other activities that are hard on horses feet and legs and expect everything to be normal and great two weeks after you remove the shoes. Impatient people always want the easy and fast way, so they make excuses that their horse NEEDS shoes since it is easier for them. Selfishness and not putting the horse first is all that really means!

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#### Things I Think are Important When Trimming Horse Hooves

I thought I would do a list of top 10 things to watch for and then as I was thinking, there are other things to remember and look out for when trimming your horses. Therefore, here is my list of things that I think are important about trimming hooves.

Less is more: It is better to take off too little than too much. It is better to trim a little every week than once every 8 weeks. Doing less changes the hoof slower and does not shock the horse's balance or hoof.

The Hoof Wall: It is a capsule for the hoof. It holds many things together. Nails in the

hoof compromises the hoof wall, which allows dirt and bacteria inside the hoof. The hoof wall protects the interior hoof, so making it thin or filing the sides weakens the hoof wall. The only part of the hoof wall that should be trimmed is the part that touches the ground. The hoof wall should not be shorter or higher than the sole.

**Balanced and Level hoof:** This is a guideline and not an absolute required perfection. The hoof wall should be about level with the sole, but should not be shorter. It is better to have a little long hoof wall past the sole than too short and have it higher and above the sole. Ideally, if the hoof wall is very slightly longer than sole then they will grow together and become tougher as one.

**The Sole:** The sole is not weight bearing and is also weight bearing, depending on ground surface type. In sand pressure is on the sole and hoof wall. On hard surfaces or concrete, the hoof wall should be more weight bearing than the sole. On barefoot horses, the sole is used more than on shod horses. The sole is naturally shaved or foliated so it wears down with use. I only remove sole when it is uneven and gets bumps or protrusions that go past the hoof wall. If the sole is thick, the hoof wall has to be longer than sole. If the sole foliates then the hoof walls become longer than sole since the sole is now shorter or higher. A balanced approach is best. Keep the sole and hoof walls almost even with the sole a little shorter or with the hoof wall a little longer.

**The Bars:** This again is said to be weight bearing and NOT weight bearing. If the bars are being pushed over and out then they are too long and are bearing too much weight. When dealing with bars, I think it is better to have them level with sole rather than longer or taller than sole. The rear of the bar helps determine the height of the heel.

**The Heel:** Another area that some say high is better other say lower is better. I say not too long or not too short. Too short is touching or almost touching the bulb. Too long is making the horse walk on the toe too much. Balance is better, the sole determines the heel height. Longer than sole is better than shorter than sole. The bars and sole come back and balance with the heel. If the heel is too short, the hoof is not balanced and the horse walks on the heel instead of the entire hoof. If it is too long, then more weight is on the toe and the hoof is not carrying the load balanced.

**The frog:** Some say trim short, some say do not trim. I think a little longer is better than too short. The frog wears down like the sole and the hoof wall. So it should not be shorter than the sole. Since the hoof flexes, it should touch or get pressure from the ground when the horse walks, but should not be lower than the hoof wall since that would cause too much pressure. So laying a rasp or straight stick across the hoof the rasp should touch both sides of the hoof wall but it should not touch the sole or the frog. If the frog touches the frog slightly with no pressure then that would be about perfect. That way when pressure from the horses weight is put on the hoof, then the frog will get slight pressure. The flexes is encouraged and assisted by pooling or scooping the quarters of the hoof wall.

**Dealing with flares:** Flares are caused by many things but normally by overgrowth of the hoof wall. If the hoof is trimmed every two weeks, flares will not happen since overgrowth is prevented. When a flare happens, it should be corrected from the bottom of the hoof wall and not so much from the side of the hoof wall. But if it is bad some slight shaving of the side wall may be needed. Flares unbalance the hoof, since one side gets more weight and pressure it causes the hoof wall to relieve that pressure by moving out or flaring. This also causes a separation of the hoof wall and sole, both weaken the hoof and put unbalanced pressure, which throws off balance and pressure so the horse's weight is put on the quarter, toe or heel. This deforms the hoof as it grows. Prevention of flares is much better than correction of flares.

**Dealing with Splits and Chips:** Splits normally start as chips. They can also start from damage of the cornet band or damage to hoof wall. Chips on the bottom of the hoof wall can be managed and rounded to help prevent chips. When a chip happens it changes the balance of the hoof and transfers more pressure to other parts of the hoof. So by rounding and re-balancing the hoof slightly, you help prevent the chip from becoming a split. The more balanced the hoof the more the weight is distributed evenly so the less pressure points occur on the hoof. Again, a slight trim and rounding every two weeks keeps the hoof more balanced and even so minor things are corrected before they advance to more troublesome issues. More frequent trims also helps the



hoof grow more evenly with even pressure and balanced growth, so that makes the hoof stronger. A stronger hoof supports weight more evenly, wears more evenly and functions better.

**Scooping or Pooling Quarters:** This is basically making the quarters a little shorter than the toe and heel. This is fine-tuning the hoof. By pooling or scooping the quarters, you allow a little spring or flexing action in the hoof whereby the toe and heel flatten out creating more movement in the hoof. This movement encourages sole growth and foliation, frog pressure and pumping action and increases blood flow to hoof. This is very easy to do too much, so remember less is more and better to have too little scoop than too much.

If this does not make sense or you do not understand the terms I used, then YOU need to do more reading and studying so you know parts of the hoof. Working on a hoof is like horsemanship, it is a process and not an event.

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### Good Hoof Sites:

Here are some good [pictures of healthy hooves](#)

This site has a lot of selling and pushing items (not endorsing any products), but has good pictures of [good and bad hooves](#)

Here are some good [pictures of hooves before and after trims](#)

Here is a nice report that explains the importance of [Breakover and heal verses toe landing](#).

Here is a great article on [proper hoof care and how bad shoes are](#). In this article it states that "Studies showed that the impact force a shod hoof receives on hard ground is 10-33 times that of an unshod hoof. The vibrations set up in the hoof by the vibration of the metal shoe is approximately 800 Hz, compared to "only" 150 Hz with a rubber shoe." That is just the horse, then add the weight of gear, people, running and jumping and people wonder we have so many lame horses.

Here is an article on [transitioning from shoes to barefoot](#). There is a great explanation that says "THE REASON FOR THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AFTER REMOVING THE SHOES IS THE HEALING OF A DEFORMED HOOF, ALTERED FROM ITS NATURAL, PHYSIOLOGICALLY SOUND SHAPE."

Things to consider if you are planning on [going barefoot or getting rid of shoes](#).

Here is a lot of good photos of [the hoof before and after barefoot trimming](#).

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[Move to top of page](#)

If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got -- If you think you can or think you can't, you are probably right. -

Rick Gore Horsemanship --- Think Like A Horse --- Horsesguy@yahoo.com