

Horse Hoof Cracks Splits and Chips

Hoof cracks, splits and chips are a common problem in the equine world. With proper management they can be eliminated in most circumstances.

A few definitions of terminology:

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A hoof crack is the tearing of the hoof wall, noticeable on the outside in the form of an abnormal groove facing either horizontal or vertical.

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The word split comes into play when a crack or chip becomes more extreme, widening and leaving a noticeable gap.

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When a horse's hoof is chipping it is losing stability at the bottom of the hoof, tearing chunks of hoof wall off.

A few reasons why a horse hoof may chip, crack or split:

- Dry Weather - A horse's hooves require the natural moisture found in rain and dew. In hot, dry weather, a horse's hooves may require extra attention by the horse owner with hoof oils and conditioners to keep them from becoming brittle and breaking off.

- Hoof chipping may be the result of long hooves. This is of course remedied easily by having a competent farrier out on a routine schedule specifically advised for that horse.

- Concussional Injury may result in a hoof crack. Often a horizontal hoof crack will have been caused by a stray kick gone wrong. Commonly these horizontal cracks may be accompanied by heat in the hoof. A farrier and vet may be called to assess the extremity of the injury.

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Nutritional Concerns. A horse's hoof growth is affected by what they eat. Sometimes, one may find a horse that needs extra vitamin and supplement than the rest of the herd. This will be noticeable in the form of hairline cracks from the coronet band down to ground level. A good hoof supplement will often take care of this problem.

What to do about a horse hoof crack, split, or chip?

So you've got a horse with a hoof crack, split or chip - now what? Well, there's a few options depending on the extremity of the issue. If there is enough of a split to cause constant destabilization when your horse is moving, you will need to stabilize that hoof. This is done by putting a shoe on and perhaps adding a patch to give enough surface to nail to and bring added support.

If your horse is just chipping because of length, consider calling your farrier out on a shorter schedule. Now if he's chipping out and you've got a decent schedule going, ask your farrier about the quality of the hooves. Sometimes a good hoof supplement will help remove a hoof problem that involves a "flaking off" of the outside hoof substance. This takes time to see the results because a hoof generally takes from 8-12 months to regrow fully from coronet band downward. And remember if your climate is dry, hoof oils will help your horse from getting brittle hooves and chipping them off.

Now if your horse has a crack that runs vertically from the coronet band downward, this is usually an issue of trauma that has damaged the horn producing cells at the very top of the hoof. If damaged badly this area will not produce hoof any further and the horse will have this crack pretty much for life. There are some interesting experimental treatments that have been showing signs of progress in the industry to reactivate growth in this area.

If the vertical crack does not reach the coronet band than the hoof will be able to be repaired. Burning across a vertical crack will subsequently aid the stabilization of that area and prevent the crack from continuing upwards. Sometimes a shoe will be a good idea to maintain that stabilization until the crack grows out. The use of staples or stabilization bar with screws is another option and may work well in larger cracks that border on a split.

If you have many hair-line cracks that run vertically all around your horses hooves, this is generally due to a lack of something in your horses diet. Keep in mind, this can be specific to a certain horse in a herd even though all horses are receiving the same diet, but if all horses are looking that way, consider a change in pasture or feed. In these cases a good hoof supplement is also a good idea.

Horizontal cracks are usually not an issue unless they are so drastic that they destabilize the hoof capsule by making it seem like the bottom section could almost be pried off with enough pressure. In these cases the use of staples or stabilization bar with screws may be an option depending on location. Another option is using a special mesh that is designed to be used in conjunction with a hoof patch. This may help stabilize the area, but make sure you clean and sterilize it as best as possible.

Of course, all work on a horses hooves should be done by a trained professional.

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