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White line disease. treatments.

White line disease goes by several names: seedy toe, yeast infection, and wall separation are just a few. Not everyone agrees as to its exact cause, though it is subject that much has been written about. It does appear to be an anaerobic situation. Once exposed to the air it will usually be arrested and eventually grow out with the hoof wall. Treatment has traditionally been to dig out the infected area with a small pick or dremel type tool and then to treat with some form of liquid or creamy type chemical. The chemical can be any of the traditional off the shelf preparations: Nufoot, merthiolate, formalin, white lightning, and thrush medicines, etc. Much of the time these remedies will stop the progress of the disease. Even very caustic solutions like gasoline or turpentine have some affect on temporarily controlling the disease. Feed additives have some arresting affect also, products like Nufoot will work in many cases.

Sometimes the disease is very advanced or will not respond to traditional remedies. If a very large area, say 2 or 3 square inches in size is involved, the problem becomes a bit more complicated. Options are removal of the hoof wall over the infected area, soaking the hoof in commercial preparations, meticulous daily cleaning etc. These will work but require a lot of effort by the farrier and horse owner. Sometimes the treatment is worse than the disease itself.

In advanced cases where the depth of penetration is more than 1 inch up the hoof wall or where the disease has gone inward and caused an infection, I find the easiest and least invasive treatment is to drill an access hole at the top of the infected area. Inserting a small probe such as a nail or wire up from the bottom of the hoof wall will usually reveal the depth of the infection. This depth can be transferred to the outside of the hoof wall and marked on the exterior wall. This will give one very precise location to make a small hole.

I usually use a Dremel tool with a barrel shaped bit #DRE115. These bits can be purchased at most quality hardware supply stores. The advantage of this particular bit is that it has cutting surfaces on both the sides and face. So one can drill straight in and, if needed, one can cut sideways to enlarge the exposed area. A plastic sleeve can be slid over the bit to limit the cutting depth and prevent it from penetrating to deeply. If at first the sleeve will not allow the bit to go deep enough, small amounts of the plastic sleeve can be removed to decrease its length to achieve deeper penetration. Hoof nippers work great for cutting the sleeve.

If the first hole does not come to the very top of the infection, the hole can be enlarged or a new hole can be drilled above it. Small nails or wires can be bent and fashioned to probe the drilled area through this access hole. With practice this entire procedure can be done in less than 15 minutes. The infection is now exposed to the air and will just about always stop growing. Hardly ever does one have to invade the blood supply. Topical dressings can also be applied to totally arrest the infection. **THE KEY TO SUCCESS IS: THE ACCESS HOLE MUST BE AT THE TOP OF THE INFECTED AREA.**

If the infected area is not just a small tunnel shaped shaft and is quite wide at the top, then one can make a sideways cut with the dremel tool. This will expose the entire top area to the air while all the hoof wall below the area remains intact. If a large area is involved then a support shoe such as a heartbar should be installed, otherwise mechanical founder is possible.

I have been using this technique for over 15 years and have shared it with dozens of farriers. It is the least invasive and most consistently successful procedure for treating advanced cases of white line disease.

The benefits are many:

It takes less than 100 dollars of equipment.

Very little hoof wall is removed.

The horse can usually be ridden immediately

The procedure usually takes less than 15 minutes

The horse owner doesn't have to spend as much time treating the area, just keeping it exposed to the air by picking out the site once or twice a week will usually suffice.

No pain to the horse

Very small chance of the horse injuring itself while being turned out in pasture since the exposed area is so small.

John Halko CJF



Hoof on left shows partial debride. Notice how exposed the hoof is to injury. Hoof on right has same amount of seedy toe. Both hooves will completely heal.



The hole was purposely drilled too low. If infection is higher than the hole, the hole can be enlarged or a 2nd hole can be drilled directly above the first.