

Treating Horse Injuries at Home

A Guide to Assembling an Equine First Aid Kit

Suzannah Kolbeck

Maybe you've already experienced this: the day is gloriously sunny as you head out to the pasture, halter in hand, to gather your equine friend for the day's activities. When you spot them, they are standing lame, one leg cocked underneath them, or maybe flies are clustered around a wound that has mysteriously appeared on their chest overnight.

It's summertime, and you're not alone.

Swedish animal insurance company Agria found that horse injuries of all kinds increase by 32% from June to August. This coincides with a busy show season but may also be caused by more turnout or longer trail rides.

Although it's always wise to consult your vet when you're not sure how serious an injury is, keeping a stocked horse first aid kit can help you either treat minor injuries or stabilize your horse while you wait for the vet.

Now is the time to start putting together a first aid kit.

Assembling an equine first aid kit

Your basic first aid kit should consist of the following supplies. Many of these can be purchased cheaply online or in the human first aid section of the drugstore.

Medications

- Antiseptic cream ointment
- Betadine
- Rubbing alcohol
- Wonder dust (wound powder)
- Nitrofurazone wound ointment
- Swat Clear (for keeping flies off of open wounds)
- Electrolyte paste (powder works here, too)
- Ichthammol ointment
- Hydrogen peroxide
- Antibiotic spray
- Triple antibiotic ointment
- Epsom salts
- Sterile saline solution
- Petroleum jelly



Additionally, a vet can prescribe you a supply of banamine and phenylbutazone ('bute) for your tack trunk. These medicines should not be used unless you have consulted with a vet, but in an emergency situation it is good to have them on hand so your horse does not need to wait for pain relief.

Tools

- Digital thermometer (with string)
- Scissors with blunt tip
- Gauze squares (4" x 4" are a good size)
- Diapers or sanitary napkins (for soaking feet but also for heavy bleeding)
- Vet wrap or other self-stick wrap
- Tweezers
- Large syringe (for irrigation but also to administer medications orally)
- Ice pack
- Pulled cotton batting
- Duct tape
- Plastic wrap
- Latex gloves
- Safety pins
- Ziploc bags
- Set of standing wraps
- Paper towels
- Pocket knife



If your vet needs to prescribe antibiotics or other injectables, it is also good to have a supply of syringes on hand

(and to know how to use them; ask your vet to show you the area for injection during your horse's next check-up).

A stethoscope is also helpful, but it's not strictly necessary to administer basic first aid.

Organizing your kit

Once you have your equine first aid supplies assembled, organization is key. The last thing you want to be doing in an equine first aid emergency is rooting around a dusty tack trunk trying to find what you need.

Look for a carrying case that closes tightly, has plenty of compartments, and comes with a handle for easy transport. Fishing tackle boxes and plain tool boxes work here.

Why you need more than one first aid kit

If you are on the road to shows throughout the summer, it's good to keep a smaller version of your first aid kit in your truck or trailer. This is one less thing to forget when you're busy packing for the show.

Trail riders should also have some basic horse first aid supplies in their packs. At a minimum, you should be able to treat minor wounds, cut your horse free from entangled wire, and administer electrolytes if necessary.

Know how to administer basic first aid

From cleaning a wound to wrapping a leg and treating minor symptoms of colic until the vet arrives, it's important to know some basic first aid for your horse. A high-quality basic equine first aid manual is key.

For the barn

One of the best options is Dr. Kellon's Guide to First Aid for Horses: A Quick and Easy Reference to Conditions That Require Emergency Treatment by Eleanor Kellon VMD. This comprehensive manual is spiral-bound to lay flat and features over 350 pages on identifying and treating common (and not-so-common) injuries and illnesses.

Another good choice is the Horse Owner's Veterinary Handbook by Thomas Gore, Paula Gore, and James M. Giffin. At a whopping 746 pages, there's not much it doesn't cover.

It's too hefty for travel, but it's likely the only book you'll need for equine first aid at the barn.

For the truck or trail

An invaluable resource when traveling to a show or out on the trail, First Aid for Horse and Rider: Emergency Care For The Stable And Trail by Nancy S. Loving and Gilbert Preston covers common injuries for people and horses. It fits in a pack or in a smaller kit in the truck.

Don't be caught off-guard

Horses seem to travel out of their way to injure themselves. Even if your pasture puff has never suffered even a tiny scratch, waiting until they come up lame or suffer a puncture wound is not a good strategy. Start assembling your equine first aid kit today so you're prepared when tomorrow comes.