



Founder: Fast Facts

What Causes Founder? Founder is a response to toxicity in the horse's body. A trigger factor, such as major stress, illness, or a sudden dietary shift precipitates the laminitic episode. The metabolic upset that is caused leads to the overproduction of proteins called MMPs, which trigger the disorganization and destruction of the laminar basal cells, leading to the failure of the laminar membrane. The important thing to remember about founder is that *the symptoms of founder occur after significant damage has already been done*. Some laminitic horses teeter on the verge of founder for years, with stretched white lines, dropped soles, and massive fat deposits which go untreated.

Why is a natural approach preferable to traditional methods? There are many problems with the current method of founder treatment. One of the most obvious is that it rarely succeeds. There is a common misconception in the equine community that founder is "for life." This is not true! Although unfortunately many horses live out the rest of their days suffering the remnants of a laminitic attack, *this is not and does not have to be the norm*. A natural approach that *stresses and addresses the root causes of founder and seeks to correct them* can return horses and their hooves to great condition after a laminitic episode. Many of the things that cause founder are poor management practices, such as not allowing enough turnout, overfeeding or feeding a diet that is too rich or sugary, and balancing the hoof incorrectly. The whole horse approach of natural hoofcare corrects what causes laminitis in the patient, therefore preventing repeated episodes and improving management to alleviate symptoms more quickly and completely.

Why do traditional methods fail and how is the barefoot approach different? Natural approaches to founder rehabilitation take into account the whole horse, and focus on whole horse wellness rather than the management of immediate symptoms. Traditional methods are misguided in their symptom-centered approach. *Since the hoof is not the root cause in laminitis it cannot be used as the basis of treatment*. Shoes prevent the wear of the hoof capsule, so hooves continue to grow longer, creating more flare at the dangerous founder angle and increasing painful leverage and tearing in the laminae. Barefoot trims remove as much flare as possible from the wall, reducing leverage and

allowing for optimal wear and movement. Keeping the horse comfortable enough to move is key, as movement allows for optimal blood circulation in the hooves, an important part of healing. Keeping a horse stalled and keeping him from moving, as many traditional approaches advise, does not allow for wear or movement, causing poor circulation and reducing the ability of the horse to heal. Natural founder treatment manages the diet and eliminates anything that could have potentially upset the horse's system and caused the laminitic episode, keeping the patient on a balanced diet of easy-to-digest forage and supplements and only giving bute in short cycles to minimize the ingestion of potentially upsetting agents. Traditional approaches which utilize high dosages and long regimens of bute and other medications, such as vasodilators, can cover up the severity of symptoms, and medications have potential to upset the horse's system even more. Likewise, shoes and pads often mask the severity of founder symptoms.

What steps should be taken if my horse founders? First off, remember that what you are dealing with is an aftermath. Focus on finding the cause and eliminating it in order to prevent relapse. Healing will take time but cannot happen if the initial cause of the founder is not eliminated. In other words, *no matter what is done to the hoof, the horse will remain laminitic until the cause of the laminitic episode is removed from the horse's life.* Soaking the hooves in ice water is a useful treatment during the first 72 hours of a laminitic episode. Pull the horse off all grain, treats, and grass immediately. Pull his shoes if he wears any. Allow him a mineral and salt block, and give him free choice **GRASS HAY**. *Avoid fescue at all costs!!!* It is a huge factor in laminitis – as a matter of fact, laminitis has often been referred to as “fescue foot”! Avoid all rich, sugary legume hays like fescue, timothy, and alfalfa. Stick to bland grass hays like coastal, Bermuda, orchardgrass, and bromegrass. Soak the hay to eliminate excess sugars. Keep the horse in a paddock with *no grass and where he cannot access grass by sticking his head through or under the fencing.* Spread his hay in small piles around the paddock in order to keep him moving and keep him turned out 24/7. Get his hooves trimmed every four weeks or as often as your trimmer recommends. If he is in too much pain to walk, or will not eat or stand, give him small doses of bute in a three days on/one day off cycle until he can go without it. Handwalk the horse daily, working up to moving him at liberty in a round pen or lunging/riding as his soundness improves. If he cannot walk, boot him in a padded boot such as the EasyCare RX or buy rubber mats for him to walk on. Most of all, be patient and have faith that healing will occur. The hoof is naturally a sound structure and every horse can stand and walk on his own hooves.

