



Navicular: What You Need to Know

What is Navicular? Navicular Syndrome refers to persistent, unresolved pain in the caudal (rear) area of the hoof. It can be caused by many issues, such as neurological problems, hoof conformation, bone degeneration, articular problems, tendon contraction, or injury.

How is it diagnosed? Navicular can be diagnosed in many ways. Most horses undergo a lameness evaluation including a toe extension test, observation, flexion tests, and nerve blocks. Many veterinarians also do radiographs of the navicular bone to look for bony or articular problems. MRI is being increasingly used and is especially useful for identifying soft tissue damage in these cases.

What are the options for a Navicular horse? The key to managing a Navicular horse is finding out, to the best of your abilities, what the source of the problem is. Then attempt to resolve that issue. This can be a very complicated process because Navicular presents in so many ways and has many causes.

Why should I go barefoot with my Navicular horse?

Constant toe-first landings are the catalyst for the bony, tendonous, and articular damage seen in Navicular horses.

These problems are the symptoms, not the cause.

Although internal damage has thus far not been reversible

once it has happened, most horses can be restored to rideable soundness with natural treatment. The vast majority of “navicular” horses suffer from incorrect hoof conformation.

Two hoof forms are most often seen in these horses, both results of incorrect loading of the hoof. The first is known as LTLH, which stands for “long toe, low heel.” The heels are very soft, deep, and contracted, and are often infected. The digital cushion is underdeveloped and the angle of the hoof is broken back, resulting in a dropped sole, stretched white line, and abnormally long toe. This causes improper loading and painful movement. The other is a very upright, severely contracted hoof, with deep, soft infected frogs and chipping toes.

Shoes and pads worsen the problem by preventing proper loading of the caudal hoof and allowing contraction to continue. Since shoes are made to fit the hoof, they tend to perpetuate incorrect hoof conformation. Going barefoot and trimming for correct weight distribution allows the hoof capsule to wear and change form over time, strengthening and growing sounder as the hoof grows into a more natural shape. Most horses demonstrating this hoof conformation with Navicular symptoms do very well barefoot with supplementation, proper padding and booting, and a supportive environment. Remember: **the conformation of a horse’s hoof is only a point in time.**