@THE NATURAL PARADIGM

THE SHOE

Horses have evolved over millennia to thrive barefoot. Learn how to trust the process when you "de-shoe" your horse.

BY JAIME JACKSON, Certified AANHCP NHC Practitioner







Shoes damage the hoof - this will become evident when your NHC practitioner removes them to begin your horse's barefoot transition.

ou've made the decision to have your horse's shoes removed and you want to know what to expect. That's the right place to begin! I've created this guide to comfort you in your decision to "de-shoe" your horse by addressing the specifics involved and answering the questions that typically arise.

Trust the process

First of all, trust that this is the right decision for your horse. Horses evolved over millions of years to move soundly with unshod feet. Horseshoeing arose during the Middle Ages as a result of human ignorance, terrible boarding conditions, and diets that would destroy the integrity and health of any hoofed animal. Natural hoof care (NHC) came about in the 1980s following studies of U.S. Great Basin wild horses, which provided indisputable proof that horses can go without shoes if the wild horse lifestyle is reasonably simulated by caring guardians.

What to expect

The feet of wild horses provided the model for "natural hoof care" practiced by NHC practitioners today. NHC advocates know that all horses of every breed can go barefoot successfully. Today, hundreds of thousands of horses worldwide have had their shoes removed, and when the NHC barefoot method is used, riders realize they made the right decision. NHC will not only save you money in farrier and vet bills, but will probably ensure your horse's soundness and a life free of the serious lameness issue that continue to take a toll on shod horses. Here's what to expect:

1 Horseshoes always cause damage to the horse's foot. It ■ doesn't matter how he was shod, how great the shoer's reputation, or what kind of shoes (metal, plastic, rubber pads, etc.) were used. When your NHC practitioner removes the shoes, the damage will be evident, and he will explain to you the nature of this damage (see sidebar). Happily, as soon as the shoe is removed, the foot can begin to heal!

Your horse was born with the "right shoes" already on his feet they're called hooves!

The NHC practitioner will take critical measurements of the hooves. This data is important because it tells the trimmer in specific numbers how much damage has occurred and what the projected timeline for healing will be, both short and long term. Short term healing relates to the time it will take for new growth to replace what is called the "nailing zone" - that lower part of the hoof wall damaged by the nails driven in to secure the shoe. This generally takes two to three months, depending on how deep and high into the hoof the nails were placed. Long term healing relates to the recovery from any unnatural changes in growth patterns and hoof mass. In these instances, the projected healing timeline can be many months to years.

 The horse's entire musculoskelature is affected by shoeing. Like the hooves, the body will undergo healthful changes after the shoes are removed. Typically, a shod horse will develop muscle mass across his body in ways that counter the imbalances caused by unnaturally shaped feet. For example, a hoof with excessively long toes would obstruct collection – the natural ability of the horse to flex his neck/head, round his back, and gather his hind legs under him when doing work. This results in atrophy of the back muscles, pronounced withers, and a weakened back.

When shoes are removed, your horse's temperament and attitude towards life will change for the better. He will be more secure and comfortable using his feet. Imagine if you were forced to walk in shoes that didn't fit your feet. Well, your horse was born with the "right shoes" already on his feet – they're called hooves!

Your horse will move better and more naturally. This is to be expected for the same reasons given above. A horse cannot physically engage his natural gaits if anything prevents him from doing so.

JAIME JACKSON IS A 35-YEAR VETERAN HOOF CARE PROFESSIONAL, LECTURER, AUTHOR, RESEARCHER AND NOTED EXPERT ON WILD AND DOMESTIC HORSE HOOVES. IN THE EARLY 2000S, JAIME CREATED THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF NATURAL HOOF CARE PRACTITIONERS, NOW CALLED THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF NATURAL HORSE CARE PRACTICES (AANHCP.NET). HE HAS PUBLISHED FIVE BOOKS — THE NATURAL HORSE: LESSONS FROM THE WILD; THE HORSE OWNER'S GUIDE TO NATURAL HOOF CARE; FOUNDER: PREVENTION & HEALING THE NATURAL WAY; PADDOCK PARADISE: A GUIDE TO NATURAL HORSE BOARDING AND THE NATURAL TRIM (FORMERLY THE OFFICIAL TRIMMING GUIDELINES OF THE AANHCP). JAIME RESIDES IN CENTRAL CALIFORNIA.

Hoof damage caused by shoeing

- Thin, brittle hoof walls
- Thin, hypersensitive soles or overgrown "compacted" soles
- Wall splits/cracks
- Wall to sole separation at the white line
- Wall "flare" (excess outer wall growth)
- Contracted heels
- · Entire hoof contracted
- · Contracted coronary band
- · Contracted frog
- Frog thrush
- Overgrown bars
- · Quarter cracks
- Run under hoof (long toe/low heel syndrome)
- Infected nail holes
- Nail placement in the white line or sensitive tissues
- Wry foot (hoof collapsed to one side or the other)
- Backed up toe wall ("bull nose" or convex toe wall)
- "Slipper toe" (improperly trimmed laminitic hoof or concave toe wall)
- Wall resection (hoof wall cut away to the quick)

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