

Environment and the horse's health

I talk about environment A LOT! But why?

The horse is made up of cells which form tissues which make the structures or parts of the horse, which make up the WHOLE. For health, these parts must work in equilibrium via correct metabolism.

Cells are constantly dying and being created and also transported around the body to where they are needed and chemical messages are being delivered, which help determine how the body responds to stimuli.

This stimulus is received via the horse's environment continuously and this allows the horse to adapt to its surroundings. So you could say the horse is a product of its environment, or more accurately, the horse's internal environment is a product of its external environment and therefore the health of the internal environment determines how it receives stimuli from its external environment, and so on!

So how does the horse receive stimulus from its environment? Think of all your senses...sight, touch, taste, hearing, smell and perception. So environmental information is being received by the horse via its eyes, skin and hooves, mouth, lips, ears and its energy field and intuition. In essence the environment is EVERYTHING!

Most people think of the environment as the ground it walks on and where it lives but forget about what the horse eats and drinks or the wormers it is given and even how it is approached and stroked every day. And how do we know if the environment is correct for the horse? Easy...he or she will be as healthy as they can be!

Correct stimulus (or pressure) equals correct growth. So too little, too much, or the wrong stimulus will not give correct growth and remember that cells are constantly replacing in the body. Take for example the hoof; usually a shod horse develops growth rings around the hoof wall below the coronet band. This is because the pressure from the shoe on the outer hoof wall at ground surface places too much stimulus to the coronet band from where it grows. This causes too much growth of the outer wall in comparison to the inner wall, and imbalance occurs here. However, if the outer wall was relieved (like in some natural trim methods) where it cannot receive sufficient stimulus from the ground, it will create an unhealthy wall with poor matrixing between inner and outer wall below the coronet band. This then creates imbalance between the structures of the feet and dynamic equilibrium (and high performance or soundness) cannot be achieved.

So if we can recognise what is healthy growth, we can try and calculate what is correct pressure. Also if we know how tissues grow or remain healthy, we can work out how to deliver correct pressure!

In Applied Equine Podiatry, there is a well known and very important sentence which is this:

"The horse has the innate ability to heal itself providing the environment is conducive to the healing"

Simply put, if the environment isn't correct the stimulus is incorrect and the horse may degenerate in health.

So from my perspective, I need to evaluate what is healthy for the individual horse, and advise the owner on how to create the best possible environment from a holistic point of view (because the feet don't exist on their own-they depend on the health of the rest of the body) and usually this means management changes and exercises. The High Performance Trim is only a small part in getting a healthy and high performance foot under the horse. The rest is about managing the horse in what constitutes a wildly different environment to the one it was designed to live in.

AEP really is about whole horse health care. It is not about creating a natural environment for the horse because that is unachievable. The horse lives in domestication; which is a harsh and unhealthy environment for the best part.

So that's why I strive to recognise what may be healthy or unhealthy for the horse. And it isn't just guess work...its fact. As a holistic podiatrist, I see the effects of unhealthy and healthy stimulus (or environment) in the tissues of the feet. And this isn't just because of where the horse has been walking; it comes from inside too and a healthy metabolism-which is a product of healthy environmental stimulus!

If you have a horse with a health issue (and this includes behaviour), ask WHY. The clues are ALWAYS in the environment. And before you reach for a magic pill....consider finding then root cause first as masking the problem or only treating the symptom will only make matters worse.

For AEP with Beccy or other holistic health care services and products including consultancy service (to identify environmental issues and offer alternatives) and Thunderbrook holistic feeding system go to www.holistichequine.co.uk

For more information about the science of AEP go to www.appliedequinepodiatry.org



Our own design of all year turnout area and wood bark holding pen with the start of our track system (paddock paradise) in the foreground. All the horses are our own and are mostly rescues. All are shoe less and are managed as holistically as possible with all year turnout, access to shelter and a variety of surfaces for health and conditioning.

For more information please do not hesitate to contact Beccy at Holistic Equine for AEP, holistic consultations, alternative therapies and products aimed at whole horse health

Beccy Smith BSc (Hons.) EBW RM DAEP MIAEP. Degreed Applied Equine Podiatrist, Member of the Institute of Applied Equine Podiatry. Holistic Equine. Tel: 07766 772245 / 01430 449233. E-mail:

beccy@holistichequine.co.uk. More info, links and articles can be found at www.holistichequine.co.uk.