

## The Equine First Aid Kit

What should your horse's first aid kit include?

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Your horse just spooked and ran off, crashing through a fence landing upside down against the gate. Your first thoughts? How seriously he is injured? How long will it take for the veterinarian to arrive?

As soon as you can evaluate the injuries, you turn to get your first aid kit. But can you remember where it is? Is it in the barn or in the trailer? And do you have the appropriate items in it to help stabilize your horse before your veterinarian arrives?

comic horse

Horse owners tend to panic when emergencies occur, often because they don't remember where their equine first aid kit is, or because they aren't sure what is in the kit. Save yourself the last-minute panic by considering the pre-planning ideas in this article.

### Location of the Kit

There are two primary areas for the kit location: the barn and the horse trailer. You can certainly have a single portable carrying case with all the first aid items in it, which reduces the cost of a second kit. I recommend having two first aid kits. That way, you have one kit no matter your location, and you can also transfer supplies from one to the other if necessary to short-term restock.

### Four Categories

Four primary types of items make up the list of items to consider carrying in the kit. The first is non-prescription medicine items such as antibacterial soap, antibiotic cream and alcohol. The second is physical items such as a thermometer, bandaging material and gauze sponges (4x4" size). The third is a newer class of first aid items, naturopathics such as Devils Claw, Aloe Vera and Rescue Remedy. The fourth are prescription items such as phenylbutazone (bute), flunixin (Banamine) and dexamethasone (Azium). As with all prescription items, consult with your veterinarian to see if any of the items are right for you and your horse.

### Over the Countercaution

Let's begin with the non-prescription medicine category and look at what is available. There is some degree of overlapping in this category, so pick and choose the items needed for your individual first aid kit. An antibacterial/disinfectant solution is necessary to clean a wound to remove any dirt and debris along with killing any infectious agents such a bacteria or fungi. The most common solutions are Betadine (povidone-iodine),

Nolvasan (chlorhexidine diacetate), and hydrogen peroxide (dihydrogen dioxide). The first two are the most common and recommended by most veterinarians. Dilute the solution in water prior to cleansing or flushing.

Use antibiotics to add antibiotics to the wound as well as keep the wound moist. The most common are Neosporin, which is a combination of three antibiotics, but others such as Furacin (nitrofurazone) have been used for many years. Another antibiotic to consider is a sterile ophthalmic (eye) ointment such as a triple antibiotic ophthalmic ointment or tetracycline ophthalmic ointment. Do not use eye ointments with hydrocortisone until the horse is examined by a veterinarian.

Electrolytes, used to restore electrolyte balance in horses that have become dehydrated through sickness or stress, can be handy in your first aid kit. A tube of electrolyte paste used as per the manufacturer's directions can replenish electrolyte deficiencies. It is critical that horses have access to water after the electrolyte administration.

#### Bandages, Thermometers & More

The next category is physical items, which include items to evaluate your horse as well as items to treat and support injuries. A thermometer is essential. I recommend having two or three around the barn and in the kit. Glass thermometers are the most consistent but are more dangerous due to the possibility of glass breakage. Digital thermometers are safer, but be aware that batteries can get low and most do not have a low battery indicator, so a false reading is possible. Your horse's normal temperature should be between 99.0 and 101.5 degrees F. A stethoscope can help you monitor your horse's heart, lungs and abdominal activity. This information can be useful in determining the severity of the situation. If a stethoscope is not available, the heart rate can be taken on the facial artery located across the angle of the jaw. Your horse's normal pulse rate should be between 24 and 40 beats per minute.

#### Cuts & Lacerations

If your horse has a cut or laceration on his leg, you will need bandaging material such as 4 x 4" gauze sponges, disposable baby diapers or sanitary napkins. These are used to cover the wound to prevent blood loss, prevent further contamination and keep the medication in contact with the wound after treatment. Quilted wraps are good to keep the sponges or pads in place and allow further absorption of blood if you have a severe cut. If the wound is bleeding severely and is soaking through the pads and wraps, do not remove them to put on fresh wraps. Stack new wraps over the existing soaked wrap and the bandage over the top until the veterinarian arrives. I recommend keeping two to four of the quilted wraps in the first aid kit. These wraps are also good for giving support to a

leg if a tendon or ligament strain has occurred. In the case of a fracture, use plenty of thick wraps and rolled cotton, then bandage over the material.

You can bandage over the wraps with Ace bandage or adhesive tape. In an emergency, almost any kind of tape will do. The reusable Ace bandages are nice because they don't stick to leg wraps and they can be easily changed and rewrapped. Elasticon is a very good tape, but it is sticky and hard to remove from skin and hair. Remember to keep your wraps smooth and applied with even pressure underneath the bandage.

Ice bags or chemical ice packs can be used to prevent or reduce swelling from blunt trauma (e.g. a shoulder that hit a barrel), soft tissue strains such as a "bowed" tendon and for reduction of swelling around a fresh wound. Tweezers and/or hemostats can be used to remove splinters or other foreign bodies that might be lodged in your horse's skin.

Scissors, a knife or wire cutter first aid kits can be used for cutting clothes, straps or ropes that you or your horse may be tangled in during an emergency. Keep a writing pad with your veterinarian's phone number on it. Also record information such as the time of injury and medications given. A flashlight, twitch and hoof pick are other items to be added to the kit.

#### Prescription Items

The final category deals with the prescription pharmaceuticals that can only be sold through a licensed veterinarian who has an established relationship with the client and the horse. The first is Banamine (flunixin meglumine) and phenylbutazone (bute), which are both non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications. Banamine is particularly good for colic, high fever with endotoxins and ophthalmic (eye) pain. Phenylbutazone is a very good anti-inflammatory, but an injection cannot be given intramuscularly, due to severe reactions. Xylazine, butorphanol and dormosedan are all sedatives and analgesics, which should only be used as directed by your veterinarian.

#### Toolbox

Finding the right-sized toolbox to keep all of your first aid items can be a dilemma, so purchase items before locating an appropriate toolbox. Equine first aid kits are available at many different stores. Don't wait – stock up now so you'll be ready to stabilize your horse during any future medical emergency.

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## Naturopathic Products

The next category is the newest one, involving the use of first aid items of natural origin. I do not profess to be an expert in this field so I will list what is noted about a few of these naturopathic items.

Homoeopathic Arnica: Listed for any type of physical pain & trauma. Can be given to ease stiffness and relieve inflammation after trauma or prior to strenuous workouts to prevent soreness.

Rescue Remedy: Listed for shock, stress or fear. Claims to have a stabilizing and calming effect in a variety of stress-inducing situations.

Homoeopathic Hepar Sulph: Listed as a major remedy for abscesses and painful inflammatory conditions such as abscesses in the hoof or strangles; extreme pain and sensitivity to touch; stimulates healing to take place.

Equee Cooling Gel: Listed as an advanced aromatherapy leg gel, containing essential oils with anti-inflammatory & analgesic properties.

Aloe Vera and Manuka Gel: Listed for cuts, wounds and abrasions.

Arnica Cream: Listed for all bruising, inflammation, and swellings.

Valerian Root Herbal Tincture: Listed as a relaxant and provides mild pain relief. Gives relief from emotional stress, reduces anxiety, nervousness, and muscular tension. Soothes the nervous system. For horses that can become tense, difficult and nervous during training or at competitions.

Devils Claw Herbal Tincture: Listed as an analgesic and anti-inflammatory effect said to be comparable with phenylbutazone and cortisone.

Comfrey Herbal Oil: Listed for soft tissue damage, muscle injury and strain relieves bruising, sprains, splints, ligaments, as well as cuts and abrasions. Effective & soothing on skin complaints or in a poultice.

Amethyst Crystal: Listed as the master healer. Stimulates the immune system, reduces anger, impatience. For skin irritations and infections, chafing, wounds and cuts. I would refer you to a veterinarian who is skilled in this field for more specific information on these items.