

Leg Wrapping 101

Are you wrapping like a pro?

By Jeanie Long.

Leg wraps can be confusing. The art of wrapping legs is even more mind-boggling! Do you know the difference between a track bandage, a polo wrap, a standing bandage or a shipping bandage? Should you wrap to the inside or to the outside? Counterclockwise or clockwise? Careful wrapping is appropriate for dozens of applications, but careless wrapping techniques can actually cause serious problems for your horse.

Read on for valuable information to help you better understand leg wrapping—types of wraps, when to wrap, problems that can occur and most importantly, how to wrap those legs correctly.

Wrap Huh?

Whether you show competitively, trail ride or just simply enjoy your equine friends, knowing how to correctly wrap their legs can be beneficial. For instance, the morning after a long trail ride, your horse's legs could be slightly swollen. This might not be serious enough to place a call to your veterinarian, but applying a liniment and a stable bandage could possibly help alleviate his problems.

Even though leg wraps are useful, they can cause confusion, especially if you do not understand why they are used and how they are constructed. In this article, Katie Wimberly, a C2 member of the Ocala Pony Club, and her 8-year-old Thoroughbred gelding, Milo, help to illustrate the four basic types of leg wraps, including exercise wraps, stable wraps, shipping wraps and wound bandages.

Exercise Wrap

Also referred to as the polo wrap, the exercise wrap is used to support the flexor tendons during a workout. It consists of a single roll of soft fleece, cotton or slightly elastic material. When using an exercise wrap, it is very important to keep even pressure — pay careful attention not to wrap too tightly or too loosely.

“Polo wraps are used for flatwork, polocross and other activities,” Katie says. “They aren't appropriate for cross-country events or trail riding [because of water].”

The best wrap jobs almost look as if they are painted on the horses legs. Bumps, inconsistencies or loose ends on a wrap job can actually cause

more harm than good. To get started with exercise wraps, you will need four polo wraps, one for each leg. Begin by re-rolling all wraps. If you are using wraps with Velcro® closures, start at the Velcro end and wrap the Velcro into the roll (Attach Velcro to Velcro).

When the wraps are ready to be applied to the horse, follow the steps below:

- 1) Begin at the top of the cannon bone, just below the knee or hock, by placing the end of the wrap on the outside of the horse's leg.
- 2) Wrap down first, taking the wrap behind the tendons, front to back, from the top of the leg to the fetlock. Your wrap should be evenly snug. Overlap each time by half to three-quarters of the width of the wrap. (On the left side of the horse, wrap counterclockwise. On the right side, wrap clockwise).
- 3) When you reach the horse's fetlock, "cup" it with the wrap, and begin wrapping back to the top of the cannon bone.
- 4) Pay careful attention to the width of the wrap as you are wrapping back up to the top of the leg—only one wrap should be made at the top of the cannon bone. If you reach the top of the cannon bone and have too much or not enough wrap remaining, remove the wrap off and start over. The idea is to have a consistent application for the entire lower leg of the horse.

Stable Wraps

A stable wrap, or standing wrap, consists of two layers — a pillow wrap and a bandage—and covers the entire cannon bone, from knee to fetlock. This type of wrap is commonly used with a poultice or liniment to prevent or reduce swelling.

To get started, you will need a pillow wrap and a track bandage for each leg, as well as bandaging or electrical tape. Because horses vary in size and height, make sure the pillow wrap is the correct size. Katie suggests a 14-inch pillow wrap is an appropriate size for a 15.3hh horse. However, pillow wraps can be found in a variety of sizes. A track bandage or knitted poly wrap is best suited for the stable wrap because it does not stretch as much as polo wraps. Additionally, Katie advises to pre-roll the pillow wraps and the bandages to prevent dirt or shavings from sticking to the inside.

While wrapping, use even pressure. Wrapping too loose can cause the bandage to slide off; wrapping too tightly creates pressure points, resulting in chording, bidding or bowed tendons.

- 1) Place the pillow wrap just below the knee or hock; it should extend to just below the fetlock.
- 2) With even pressure, wrap front to back. The end of the pillow wrap should be on the outside of the leg. Again, wrap left legs counterclockwise and right legs clockwise.
- 3) Start the track bandage in the middle of the leg by placing the end of the track bandage between the open end of the pillow wrap.
- 4) Wrap down the leg with even pressure, overlapping by half to three-quarters the width of the bandage.
- 5) Wrap around the fetlock once and proceed back to the top of the leg. Leave a half inch of pillow wrap, top and bottom, exposed.
- 6) The bandage should end in the middle to top of the leg.
- 7) After securing the bandage, spiral tape the bandage to keep it in place—especially if the wrap will be left on the horse for an extended period of time. Electrical or bandaging tape is commonly used.

Notes of Caution:

Once you secure the stable wraps on your horse's limbs, note these further precautions to prevent harm to your horse. Katie advises that all wraps should not be left on horses for more than 12 hours. Horses should not be turned out with stable wraps because a horse could become entangled in the wraps, thus causing more damage and more problems. Furthermore, Katie advises that stable wraps should never be used in place of exercise wraps because there is too much padding and restriction of tendons and ligaments to do any good.

Wrap Storage

Keeping wraps at-hand, clean and dry may seem like an impossible task. However, Katie suggests that nearly all wraps can be washed and dried in a regular washer and dryer, unless the manufacturer states otherwise. If the material contains elastic, you may want to hang the wraps to dry.

“Be aware that if your wraps are cotton, they very well may shrink,” Katie adds.

As far as storage, plastic boxes with tight-fitting lids are appropriate for keeping moisture and rodents away from the wraps.

That's a Wrap!

Leg wrapping provides more than decoration. By understanding the difference between the types of wraps and how they are used, you can offer comfort and protection to your equine companion. However, if you are unsure about tackling the task alone, seek the help of a more experienced person or your veterinarian.

“Beginners should always have a more experienced person on hand,” Katie says. Inexperience in wrapping may lead an individual to make an unnoticeable mistake that could potentially cripple or endanger the horse.