



Ballybrown Equine Clinic



Ballybrown Equine Clinic, Ballybrown, Clarina, Co. Limerick, Ireland.

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APPLYING PRESSURE BANDAGES

Better Health for your Horse

When a horse sustains a serious leg injury, it is sometimes necessary to stabilize the limb and control bleeding and swelling until your vet arrives. A pressure bandage is an effective first aid tool that can be used to accomplish this task.

Keep in mind, however, that any leg injury serious enough to require a pressure bandage is serious enough to require immediate professional attention. You should also recognize that pressure bandages can be potentially harmful if not applied correctly. If you know how to correctly apply a pressure bandage, you can come to the horse's aid without causing further damage.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the pressure bandage is to protect the injured area and control bleeding without constricting normal circulation.

Pressure bandages are used to:

- ❖ Control bleeding.
- ❖ Minimize swelling.
- ❖ Provide support for an injured limb.
- ❖ Absorb fluids from a wound.
- ❖ Protect a wound from contamination or additional trauma.

WOUND CARE

The severity or type of injury will determine the best course of action. If there is an open wound with profuse bleeding-or it appears that a major blood vessel has been cut (blood appears to spurt not trickle) – your primary concern will be to stop the bleeding. You will probably need to forego cleaning and apply pressure to the wound immediately.

If bleeding is light to moderate, it may be best to cleanse the wound using cool running water from a hose prior to bandaging. Avoid prolonged hosing (not more than 10-12 minutes) as it may increase swelling.

A commercially available sterile saline solution or a solution of 2 tablespoons of plain salt to 1 gallon of water can also be used.

Ideally the saline solution should be applied with pressure to loosen and flush dirt and debris from the wound. Avoid scrubbing as this may further damage tissue, increase bleeding, or drive dirt and debris deeper into the wound.

An antibacterial soap can be used to wash the surrounding area, but care should be taken to avoid getting soap into the wound itself.

Stress or traumatic injuries, such as bowed tendons, will benefit from being hosed or iced for 5 -10 minutes prior to applying a pressure bandage.

PRESSURE BANDAGE MATERIALS

If an open wound is involved, gauze pads or other sterile, non-stick dressing should be placed over the wound.

Do not use cotton wool directly against a wound. While cotton is absorbent and provides excellent padding, the fibres will stick to the tissue and contaminate the wound.

Once the wound is covered, you should use cotton wool or gamgee to pad the bandage.

Adequate padding is essential to distribute pressure evenly around the limb. Padding should be at least 2 inches thick. This will allow you to apply sufficient tension to the support bandage to control bleeding and swelling. The extra padding will also absorb drainage from the wound.

Generally, the longer a bandage is to remain in place, the greater the amount of padding needed. Vetwrap can be used for the external (pressure) layer.

Bandaging material should be at least 2-3 inches wide. This will help prevent a tourniquet effect and allow for sufficient overlap of the layers.

Using stretch fabric makes bandaging easier, allows for movement, and is less apt to restrict circulation as long as it is not pulled too tightly.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

If you have never bandaged a horse's legs, ask your vet or an experienced equine professional to demonstrate the proper techniques. Practice under his/her supervision before doing it on your own.

Follow these basic guidelines:

- ❖ If blood loss does not appear excessive, clean the wound, removing as much as dirt, hair and debris as possible prior to bandaging.
- ❖ Cover open wounds with sterile, non-stick gauze or dressing. Do not apply sprays or chemicals to wounds that may need to be repaired. Water soluble ointments can always be used; petroleum based ointments should not be used in surgically repairable injuries.
- ❖ Apply soft, absorbent padding, such as cotton wool, at least 2 inches thick around the injured limb. Make sure it lies flat and wrinkle-free against the skin.
- ❖ To prevent slippage, begin the support bandage at the foot, covering the heel bulb and coronary band and work up the leg.
- ❖ Extend the pressure bandage 4-6 inches above the injury site. If the injury is in the lower leg, always bandage to the knee or hock.
- ❖ Wrap the leg front to back, outside to inside (counterclockwise on the left legs, clockwise on the right legs)
- ❖ Use smooth uniform tension on the bandage to compress the padding without forming lumps or ridges beneath the bandage.
- ❖ Apply sufficient pressure to control the bleeding, but do not wrap so tightly that you cannot slip a small finger inside the bandage.
- ❖ Do not wrap too loosely as the pressure bandage will not do its job.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

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- 1) A pressure bandage should be left in place until the vet arrives.
- 2) Point out the exact location of the injury so the vet can avoid disturbing it when removing the bandage.
- 3) If blood soaks through the bandage, place a second bandage over it as before. Do not remove it, as this will disturb any blood clots which may be forming.
- 4) Monitor and evaluate the horse frequently. Remember pressure bandages can be dangerous. If swelling develops above the bandage or lameness increases check that the bandage is not cutting off circulation.
- 5) Watch for secondary problems. If the horse loses its appetite or there is an elevation in body temperature, contact your vet. If the bandage appears too tight, cut through the support layers, leave them in place, and wrap a new bandage around the first one more loosely.
- 6) Extreme emergencies include injuries that don't stop bleeding within 15-20 minutes, lacerations that extend into joints and tendons, and severe breakdowns or injuries in which the horse is unable or unwilling to walk. In any of these situations, contact Ballybrown Equine Clinic immediately.