



Ballybrown Equine Clinic



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

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APPLYING SWEAT BANDAGES

Better Health for your Horse

When your horse suffers a strain, sprain, or traumatic injury, or is box rested for extended periods, its legs may swell and become warm to the touch. Because inflammation and swelling can damage tissues and cause discomfort, your vet may prescribe a sweat bandage as an aid in reducing fluid build-up in the legs.

Although sweat bandages are effective, the science of how and why they work still isn't precisely understood. The purpose of the sweat bandage is to generate heat (which may help dilate vessels and increase blood flow), add pressure and provide support.

Whatever the mechanism, the combined effect seems to help the body dissipate excess fluid from the injury site and reduce inflammation.

While sweat bandages are useful in reducing swelling, they are generally not recommended for recent injuries or those that include open wounds. Be sure to consult with your vet before applying one.

THE SWEAT BANDAGE

What sets a sweat bandage apart from other wraps is that a "sweating" preparation or poultice is generally applied to the leg, covered with a lightweight plastic wrap, and then bandaged.

There are a variety of commercial and homemade preparations that can be used to sweat legs. The formulation your vet recommends will depend on the type of injury and his or her personal preference.

Some of these may contain "osmotic" agents that actively help pull fluid from the cells.

Common ingredients used in sweat preparations include:

- ❖ DMSO.
- ❖ Glycerine.
- ❖ Nitrofurazone.
- ❖ Petroleum Jelly.
- ❖ Epsom Salts.
- ❖ Mineral Oil.

PROPER BANDAGING TECHNIQUES

It is essential to use proper techniques when applying a sweat bandage. Applied incorrectly, the bandage will not only fail to do its job, it can cause discomfort, restrict blood flow and potentially damage tendons and other tissue. (It is often said that it is better to leave a horse's legs unbandaged than to wrap them incorrectly.)

Remember, padding is essential for protecting limbs. At least an inch or more of soft, cushioning padding should be placed between the limb and the support bandage to distribute the pressure evenly and prevent blood flow from being restricted.

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MATERIALS

Materials needed for the sweat bandage include:

- ❖ Sweating compound (preparation).
- ❖ Lightweight plastic wrap (cellophane).
- ❖ Cotton wool or gamgee.
- ❖ Vetwrap.
- ❖ Elastoplast to protect, seal and secure the bandage.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

If you have never bandaged a horse's legs before, ask your vet or an experienced equine professional to demonstrate the proper techniques.

Follow these basic guidelines:

1. Start with clean, dry legs and bandages.
2. Apply sweating preparation liberally to the area of the leg to be bandaged.
3. Surround the leg completely in plastic wrap (cellophane), keeping the layers as smooth as possible.
4. Apply padding over the plastic wrap, encircling the leg with an inch or more of cotton padding. Make sure it lies flat and wrinkle free against the skin.
5. Wrap the leg with a support bandaging fabric at least 2-3 inches wide (Vetwrap) working counterclockwise on left legs and clockwise on right legs.
6. Wrap in a spiral pattern, beginning at midpoint and working down the leg and up again.
7. Overlap each preceding layer by 50%, exerting just enough pull to stretch the fabric to half its maximum length.
8. Use smooth, uniform tension to compress the padding without forming lumps or ridges beneath the bandage.
9. Use enough pressure to minimize swelling and keep the bandage in place, but never wrap so tightly that you cannot slip a finger between the bandage and the limb.
10. Avoid applying a bandage too loosely. Loose bandages are ineffective and may endanger the horse.
11. Extend the support fabric to within a half inch of the padding top and bottom.
12. Check the bandage regularly to make sure it is secure yet not interrupting circulation.
13. If there is a potential problem with bedding or debris getting into the bandage, seal the top and bottom of the bandage with Elastoplast.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- ❖ Do not leave a sweat bandage on for more than 12 hours. After 12 hours remove the bandage and allow the leg to “rest” for 12 hours, reapply the sweat bandage if necessary.
- ❖ After unwrapping, take a few minutes to examine the leg. It should be noticeably improved. If there are signs of increased heat, swelling, drainage or skin irritation due to the sweat consult Ballybrown Equine Clinic.
- ❖ A horse requiring a sweat bandage must be confined to a stable unless otherwise directed by Ballybrown Equine Clinic.
- ❖ If DMSO is the active ingredient being used make sure the horse’s legs are completely dry before application. Wear gloves to protect your hands.
- ❖ Check the bandage at regular intervals during the day to make sure it has not tightened, loosened or slipped out of place
- ❖ Make sure the bandage does not cut off circulation, compress tendons, create pressure sores or cause skin irritation, redness or discomfort
- ❖ Monitor and evaluate the horse carefully. If swelling develops above or below the bandage, lameness increases or the horse becomes distressed or begins to bite at the bandage contact Ballybrown Equine Clinic.
- ❖ Watch for any other signs of ill health. If the horse becomes depressed, loses appetite or has an elevated temperature, consult Ballybrown Equine Clinic.
- ❖ If you have any further questions or concerns about sweat bandaging, contact Ballybrown Equine Clinic.