

Lies Your Trimmer Tells You

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These are not deliberate lies, but falsehoods and inaccurate interpretations of facts which are accepted by many as actual truth. If you are a conscientious horse owner, especially one with a fat horse, you've probably become overwhelmed not only by the amount of information bombarding you, but by the amount of *conflicting* information. Not to mention information that disagrees with your common sense and your gut.

I sometimes feel like I live in the Twilight Zone. When I was young horses didn't have Cushings, they weren't labeled Insulin Resistant (IR), they weren't lame, they were wormed once a year, via "tubing", they went barefoot in the winter, and they seemed happy and lived long useful lives. And many many lived on pasture. The horse I took my first riding lessons on was 28. One of the ponies at the stable – who was still lively and good looking – was pushing 40. Feeds were simple. Your choices were hay, corn, oats, and sweet feed. Horse keeping was fairly simple and straightforward. As it had been for thousands of years.

Between 1991 when I left Massachusetts to move west, and today, things have changed significantly. Suddenly it seems one needs a PhD to keep horses. Now grass is poison and sore horses are the norm! If you find this situation frustrating, I hope this article will clarify things for you.

I realize there is almost unlimited information on the web – and thousands or even hundreds of thousands of people saying this, that, and the other. So I don't expect you to just blindly believe what I say. What I do hope is that the logic of what I have to say will make you think, and help you make better, easier, and more satisfying decisions for both you and your horse(s).

Grass is poison – you must keep your horse off of it and/or the horse must wear a muzzle.

I have used pasture to *cure* laminitis and founder. Experience has shown me that forcing a horse to work for its food, while limiting the amount of food which can be consumed at any one time, results in happy, healthy horses, and much simpler, and cheaper, horse management for owners. My theory was formed back in 2007 when one of my clients called to tell me her horse had foundered (I had been warning her for months to stop over feeding him). I knew the owner couldn't be trusted to cut back on feed, so I recommended she immediately put the horse on pasture. A well eaten down pasture, which I knew existed, and where one of the client's friends boarded. My instructions were to put the horse on pasture and not give him any other food. The theory being that he would have to work for his food. Being able to take only tiny bites would force him to move continually in order to get enough food to live. The constant movement would be good for his entire system, but would also burn calories. And there is the real secret to horses being able to be on grass. *Controlled consumption of calories*. It's not about the carbs as much as it is about the calories and the rate of consumption.

I wish I had taken photos! After 3 weeks on pasture, the horse looked fabulous and he felt like a racehorse. He galloped, bucked, pranced, and thought he was the king. Far from being lame he was completely sound. More shocking was the fact that his convex soles had become concave virtually overnight. (To read more about "The Grass Cure" click [here](#).)

A year or two later I repeated what I call the Grass Cure, with a Tennessee Walker. It worked magic in that case as well. The horse became sound enough to be ridden (and gait) within 6 weeks. Unfortunately, the owner “didn’t like” the mare being on pasture all the time, so she went back to being stalled, fed hay that was too high in sugar, and being very lame. I finally dropped the woman as a client and learned that the mare died a year or so later.

This year an Arab gelding who foundered last year (didn’t become my client until winter), has been successfully on pasture – the same pasture on which he foundered last year. The difference? The pasture was eaten down over the winter, so that the Arab, and his TB pasture mate (also there last year) could keep the grass short. The prior year, the horse was introduced into the pasture where only the TB had been grazing, so the grass was not short enough for an easy keeper. And it was not mowed before the horse was put on it.

This year I also talked a client into successfully transitioning her herd of 10 Peruvian Paso’s onto pasture, where they are doing fine.

Below is a photo of a current founder patient who is healing nicely – her vet is very pleased. Notice she is on grass, though her area is too large and she must wear a muzzle. (She has lost weight since foundering, though she is still fat.) She has a young foal which is still nursing. She foundered last fall, and my first visit to her was on June 19, 2013 – at which time she was so lame her owner was considering putting her down. She will be a case study on the website as time goes by.



In total, this year, 18 client horses (all who have tried it) have been successfully transitioned to 24/7 pasture.

The requirements for safe transition are as follows:

The grass must be short – either from winter grazing or from being mowed

The area must be around 1 acre per horse (at least in the beginning)

The horses must be out on the pasture 24/7 without hay (at least in the beginning).

That is it. After the horses have been on the pasture they may (most will) start to lose weight. As they near their optimum weight, either pasture size can be increased some, or supplemental hay can be offered – not FULL hay diet, just some supplemental hay.

Recently I have read that slowing a horse's food consumption rate can prevent or lessen insulin resistance ([click here for link to article](#)). And I have also read that being overweight CAUSES insulin resistance. This has been confirmed by a client of mine who had to send her mare to Purdue for an eye injury. They tested the mare when she arrived and she was IR. (She was fat – and not my client at the time.) She lost weight while she was there (still somewhat too fat) and was tested again before she left, where her numbers were much improved.

So grass is not poison, but pasture must be *managed*.

I can hear some of you saying “longer grass has less sugar, and is safer than shorter grass.” Yes, I have read that too. However, this is where science departs from logic. What people forget to consider is that SAMPLE SIZE is the same. So basically, to put it simply, 1 inch of short grass has more sugar than 1 inch of taller grass. See the disconnect? 20 inches of tall grass has a LOT more sugar (and calories) than 1 inch of short grass. So simple and yet no one seems to think of it. When the grass is short the horse must take literally countless small bites over the entire day to get enough food to live. When the grass is longer, the horse can, and does, just stuff itself.

It's normal for your horse to be sore when transitioning to barefoot.

Not true! Plain and simple. Horses coming out of shoes should get minimal to NO trim. If this happens, the horse is unlikely to be sore. (Details of how to transition safely can be found in [“The Sad Truth About Barefoot Trimming.”](#))

The problem is that this lie has become accepted as fact. Owners, trusting the “professional”, suffer with their horses but are told repeatedly that this is normal and for the horse's own good. The human desire that things must change or be fixed immediately is at fault. People getting braces for their children do not demand or expect that the teeth will be fixed in a day – why do we expect our horses' feet to be fixed in day. Taking shoes off a horse is like taking a cast off of a human leg – a cast that has been on for YEARS. The leg would not be normal strength as soon as the cast is removed, and neither are the structures inside the horse's foot. The “period of transition” should begin when the shoes come off. That is Step One of the transition. Period. Step Two, a trim, can come a few weeks later – and still should not attempt to FIX the foot in one trim.

This is one of the main reasons barefoot is rejected by so many. And justifiably so. The sad part is that barefoot practitioners will criticize farriers vehemently for making a horse sore after a trim – yet when they do it, it's okay. Anyone but me see a problem here?

It's normal that your horse needs boots to be anywhere but on grass or soft ground.

Again a lie that has become accepted as fact. Once again the hypocrisy of the barefoot trimmer is exposed. Barefoot trimmers criticize farriers (and vets) for saying "some horses just cannot go barefoot". Yet, when they decide your horse needs boots, what do they say? "Some horses just can't go completely barefoot". Or they will list all the "issues" your horse has – except one – bad trimming!

If your horse needs boots to be sound, try letting him/her go without any trimming for 8 weeks, and then see how he/she walks across gravel. I will wager you'll see a big improvement.

Compare the feet in the following photos. Both are endurance horses. One has to wear boots and the other doesn't. Can you see why one can go 25 miles at a trot over any and all terrain in 3.5 hours, and the other needs boots? Which one truly looks healthy? (Hint the healthy endurance horse's foot is on the right.)



Your horse needs a trim – the inference being it will die, the foot will fall apart, it will be unsalvageable – pick the dire consequence of your choice. (You'll hear this if you decide to skip a trim.)

Totally untrue. Another lie by implication. I have horses who have not been trimmed in over a year and some who only get trimmed once a year. Their feet look fine, there is nothing to trim, and they are sound. Not dead, not lame, not with feet a foot long, etc., etc., etc. On my website I have an article under [Case Studies, titled Self-Trimming Experiment – Money Talkin](#). It shows how his foot improved without being trimmed for 11 months. Oh, and he's a TB (as are the other 2 who go a year without trimming) - you know, the ones with the bad feet.

Barefoot hooves should look like mustang hooves.

At which point people will show you photos of a long dead hoof, which was found on a dead mustang. Not preserved in its original state the moment the horse died. This is key. If a person was cut up and parts were found in the desert – do you think your foot should look like the cadaver foot?

We should not compare our horse's feet exactly to wild horse feet; not that our horses' feet cannot be strong and sound, but because our horses do not live the lifestyle wild horses live. It's that simple. Below is a photo of some Australian aborigines. They go barefoot, and they can walk over any terrain. My feet are the same – same bones, same flesh, same blood vessels, etc., but I do not live the lifestyle of an Australian aborigine, so I cannot walk barefoot over any terrain.



Now think about this next sentence carefully and apply it to your horse . . . Since I have already admitted I don't have aboriginal feet, could my feet be made LIKE aboriginal feet if I cut some of the sole off? Could I THEN walk on any terrain?

The very idea is laughable. Of course not! I would be lucky to walk on the softest carpet. Probably I would be crawling. But that is what the average barefoot trimmer is doing to horses. Cutting off part of the bottom of the foot to make it "like a mustang foot". Really?? Mustang feet GROW to be strong, they are not cut off to be that way. Their hooves are compacted, dense, and hard. Only miles and miles on harsh terrain can make a wild mustang foot.

And all wild horses are not mustangs who live on harsh terrain. Below is a photo of a front foot of a wild Abaco horse from the Bahamas. Probably looks a lot more familiar, doesn't it? Environment dictates what type of foot a horse will have. Horses adapt to the area in which they live. No mustang would have the classic "wild horse model" hoof if it moved to the Bahamas, or to Mongolia for that matter. Your horse needs the foot appropriate for his environment.



To read some enlightening material about wild feet click the link below.

<http://www.thehorse.com/articles/28325/foot-type-and-laminitis-incidence-in-feral-horses>

To see some photos of functioning feet, wild and domestic, click the link below.

<http://www.naturalhorseworld.com/Fivekeys.htm>

Cutting is not healing. Hacking things off does not make them stronger. Muscles, bones, and hooves, must GROW stronger – with use. Cutting them into a specific shape to *force* them to be “natural”. What is wrong with that concept?

Sore horses do not grow stronger feet, as they resist *using* them – as would we. Cut a horse’s heels low and they will walk on their toes. (The primary cause of navicular by the way.)

In the wild the GROUND trims horses’ feet. Impact with the ground makes them strong. Think about the ground for a minute. Does it go online and learn how to trim feet? Does it know each horse that passes over it, and adjust accordingly? Does it measure feet? Does it wield a knife? No. The ground is passive. Just as your dog, your cat, and you can walk over the ground without losing any skin, so too can your horse. Horses’ feet are a lot harder than the soles of my feet! The photo of the (healthy) endurance horse foot above was taken a couple days AFTER going 25 miles over harsh terrain. Does it look like he got a trim? No. To make his foot like a normal “barefoot” trim – he would have had to cover 1000 miles in just several hours.

If the ground was as harsh as a “normal” barefoot trim our horses wouldn’t even need trimming!!

Things to think about people. Things to think about.

Just say no to the untruths. Listen to your horse.