

What is a Natural Trim?

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No trimming is actually "natural", as the act of a human trimming a hoof can never be natural. The only "natural" trim is the one a horse gives himself, living in wild, or similar, conditions.



When we refer to **natural trimming methods**, we refer to those that include natural living conditions as an important component of barefootedness - and horse health in general. Natural trimming also focuses on the natural integrity of the equine foot, with its physiologically correct hoof form. Experts study the wild horses' hooves for more insight into how mankind can better simulate the ideal hoof in our modern, captive conditions. However, it is important



that the parameters for a natural trim be developed from a wide range of feral equines, and not be based on just one wild horse, in one small area of the world. Wild horses live all over the world, in various terrains, climates, and environments, and their hooves have adapted. The most important parameters in common throughout the wild species of the world are low heels (indicating a nearly ground parallel coffin bone) and functional, sound feet.

The first thing on the mind of a hoofcare professional will be to figure out how to help improve your horse's hooves as efficiently as possible. Must there be discomfort involved in the transition process from a shod hoof to a barefoot hoof? First, let's take a look at the definition of "soundness." Most people equate "**soundness**" with lack of pain. If a horse can trot freely, willingly and evenly, he is sound. This, however, is a misconception. A lame horse's foot can be nerve-blocked, and he will trot "soundly." Does this make him sound? Of course not. Just because he cannot currently feel the pain, does not mean the damage is not there. The danger here is that, if the damage cannot be felt, it can continue on, unchecked, with the horse moving in such a way as to increase the damage. Such is the case with shoes, or inadequate trimming -- the horse cannot feel the damage that is actually there in existence.

However, it is our job as caretakers of the horses to minimize any discomfort. Good trimming will often relieve any pain or discomfort, and should never cause harm or create pain. If a horse is sore or lame, appropriate assistance should be provided: boots and pads to create comfort, and pain relievers (natural or prescribed) as needed.

What about someone who promises a **completely pain-free transition out of shoes**? Be careful - if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. If a horse was lame before the shoes were removed, he may still be lame after, and it may take time for the hooves to recover.

Are all horses uncomfortable after their first barefoot trim? Certainly not. Horses with mild problems, even if they have been de-shod, will often be unphased, and can continue on normally. Most horses are very happy during the trimming itself, and will show their pleasure with calmness and chewing. Horses with severe problems often find immediate relief for some of their pain. Many horses are significantly

improved after trimming, with increased comfort levels because the angle changes put their body back into a normal alignment.

If your horse's hooves are extensively damaged, your hoofcare professional will use all of his/her skills and knowledge to create the necessary balance, keeping the horse as relatively comfortable as possible, so he will keep moving. Hoof boots should always be considered whenever shoes are removed. Many horses need boots to help them stay comfortable and active through the transition period. (All barefoot horse owners should keep hoof boots on hand, just in case!)

Every horse **MUST** be trimmed as an individual. Horseowner's feedback and constant communication are crucial throughout the transition to hoof health. Owners doing their own trimming must be very careful **NOT** to overtrim their horses, and try to seek professional guidance whenever possible. Sometimes less is more, but knowledge and education are absolutely crucial, both for owners as well as professionals and practitioners everywhere.

"It must be understood that there can be no absolute values or measurements when dealing with an individual living organism, for which a multitude of factors and conditions exist at any given time -- all of which are in a constant state of change, as all living things are." -- from *The Hoofcare Specialist's Handbook* by Hiltrud Strasser, DVM & Sabine Kells.

Ultimately, proof is in the pudding. Look for results - success stories about horses trimmed for long periods of time, for both performance horses and rehabilitation cases. In the end, sound, healthy barefoot performance horses will be the proof of success of any one trimming technique.

Even if you have no access to a barefoot professional, you are still encouraged to take the steps of providing natural living conditions and removing your horse's shoes, with your farrier's help. As correct information about natural trimming techniques become more widely available, you will be able to benefit from this philosophy that provides total and complete hoof health. No matter what the exact trimming technique or method of choice, we support all forms of hoof care that promote barefootedness and more natural living conditions. In the large scope of things, the details are not so important. **It's the dawn of a new era, and barefoot horses are everywhere!**

