

# Stone Bruises

A bruised sole can happen as quickly and simply as a horse stepping on a rock or working on a hard surface. It can occur as the result of excessive hoof trimming, or be associated with laminitis. Stone bruising can be an uncomplicated condition that responds to simple treatments, or be part of an underlying disease process that requires careful veterinary management. It is one of the most common causes of forelimb lameness. Stone bruises are bruising of the solar cushion and corium (the soft tissues between the sole of the hoof and coffin bone). This bruising causes rupturing of the small vessels in the area. This results in formation of a hematoma or blood pocket, leading to acute inflammation and pain. The most obvious sign is mild or severe sudden lameness localized to the foot. A closer examination of the affected foot might reveal increased foot warmth or increased digital pulses through the digital arteries. The amount of force placed on a foot at impact is the major factor in the seriousness of sole bruising, i.e., running at high speed on rocky ground. Any horse is susceptible to stone bruising, but horses with thin soles are certainly more likely to suffer from it, as are horses with soft soles because they are kept in damp or moist conditions. It may also happen when a stone becomes wedged in the hoof. When hoof testers are applied to the foot (particularly along the quarter and/or toe) there will be a pain response. It is necessary to scrupulously clean under the hoof and to carefully pare away the superficial layers of the sole to inspect for the presence of a bruise or an abscess. It is often necessary to remove a shoe to fully inspect the sole of the affected hoof. This might show a red or purple area indicating a bruise.



Diagnosis of a stone bruise begins with the vet observing clinical signs and inquiring about any history of fast work, work on hard or rocky surfaces, or recent farrier work. The vet will check for heat in the hoof, increased digital arterial pulse, or visible evidence of a penetrating wound. As soon as lameness is evident, the horse should be rested. While stone bruising generally is not an emergency condition, prompt veterinary attention and diagnosis still should be sought.

A simple bruise should go away with a few days of rest if underlying cause, such as a trapped rock, work on rocky ground, old displaced shoe, etc., are gone. Stall or small paddock rest are often sufficient. Daily foot soaks with warm water and Epsom salts will help reduce the inflammation, the application of "drawing poultices" and sometimes using an anti-inflammatory drug to ease the pain. A vet may also give a tetanus booster.

Sometimes what appears to be a simple bruise could actually be an early undiagnosed abscess, or that simple bruise could become an abscess. Be especially concerned if the bruising occurs on a chronic basis. Horses with recurrent bruising problems could have underlying laminitis or some other problem. If bruising becomes chronic, it is more likely that an abscess can develop, and the infection may progress, and it is vital that professional advice be sought to avoid serious and permanent damage. However for a simple stone bruise just spelling the horse for five to seven days is generally sufficient.