

# Fractures

Fractures can occur as a result of stress due to repeated forces exerted over time, or from an immediate impact which can occur with a kick or a fall.

With advances in veterinary surgery many fractures are now treatable; however, some fractures cannot be successfully treated and in these cases euthanasia may be the only option.



## KEY POINTS:

- Fractures in horses are serious injuries and correct first aid and management can significantly affect the outcome.
- It is important to prevent any further damage occurring to the fracture and the surrounding soft tissues, blood vessels and nerves.
- Your vet will make an initial assessment of the horse to gauge the level of shock and physical condition of the horse as well as the location and type of fracture.
- Sedation and painkillers are often necessary to reduce anxiety and allow first aid treatment and assessment of the fracture.
- Fractures which are open, displaced, unstable or involving soft tissue damage are more difficult to treat.
- Complete fractures of weight bearing long bones in adult horses are usually not possible to treat. In these cases euthanasia is the only humane option



## Fracture classification

<b>Closed</b> (skin intact)	<b>Open</b> (wound present)
<b>Non-displaced</b> (crack)	<b>Displaced</b> (bone moved from normal position)
<b>Simple</b> (one break)	<b>Comminuted</b> (fragments present)
<b>Complete</b> (right across bone)	<b>Incomplete</b> (partially across bone)
<b>Stable</b>	<b>Unstable</b>

In general, those fractures described in the left column above carry a better prognosis than those in the right column

## Clinical signs

Signs which may indicate a fracture in your horse include:

- non-weight bearing lameness;
- pain on finger pressure over the area;
- swelling of the limb.

Fractures may not be obvious – if your horse is severely lame, a veterinary examination is recommended.

- If you suspect a fracture, unless the horse is in a dangerous position, do not move your horse until the vet arrives.

### Diagnosis and first aid treatment

The initial examination will provide your vet with information as to the prognosis for your horse, and treatment options.

The initial veterinary examination may involve:

- a small amount of sedation to reduce anxiety;
- administration of medication to provide pain relief;
- administration of antibiotics, if there is a wound or if surgery is likely to be required;
- intravenous fluids if your horse is dehydrated or in shock;
- application of a splint, cast or supportive bandage to stabilise the fracture;
- x-rays to accurately diagnose the fracture.

Prognosis for survival will depend on the type and position of the fracture, as well as the size of your horse.

Whether your horse will return to soundness following treatment is very dependent on the type of fracture and response to treatment. Your future expectations for your horse may also affect the decision to treat a fracture.



**LOWER LIMB FRACTURES CAN BE STABILISED WITH A SPLINT OR CAST**

### Treatment

Treatment will depend on the type and location of the fracture; some fractures are stable and will heal with box rest; others will require surgery to stabilise them. Fractures can be catastrophic and require immediate euthanasia to prevent further suffering.

If a decision is made to refer your horse to a veterinary hospital for surgery, your vet will arrange this and prepare your horse for safe transportation to a surgical facility.

### Considerations for surgical treatment

- Surgery to repair fractures can be expensive (often upwards of £3,000).
- The recovery period is likely to be prolonged (3-6 months) and will vary depending on the type of fracture.
- Complications can be serious and significantly increase the cost of treatment.
- The trailers or lorry used to transport horse for treatment should have a low ramp to ease loading, and the ride should be as smooth as possible.
- The horse should be secure in the trailer, not loose.
- If possible, with a forelimb fracture the tail should face forwards, and for a hind-limb fracture the head should face forwards when travelling.



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