



# Australian Equine Barefoot Movement (AEBM) Inc

[www.aebm.org.au](http://www.aebm.org.au)

## Natural Lifestyle and Healthy Hooves – Fact Sheet #1

**“Of the 122 million equines found around the world, no more than 10 percent are clinically sound. Some 10 per cent (12.2 million) are clinically, completely and unusably lame. The remaining 80 percent (97.6 million) are somewhat lame, and could not pass a soundness evaluation test.”**

– American Farriers’ Journal, Nov 2002, v.26 #6, p.5

The old saying of “no hoof – no horse” is very true! The metal horse shoe was created so the horse could be used beyond its biological limitations. It was necessary at the time of their invention as the horse was instrumental in fighting wars, transporting people and supplies, and for ploughing the farmer’s field. And throughout history shoeing has been accepted as a “necessary evil”, so the horse could be ready to ride/drive, at all times, regardless of the state of its feet. Otherwise people would likely have starved and wars would have been lost.

**“Every creature has its biological limitations. These are set by nature, and are intended to protect an organism from damaging itself.”**

- Dr Hiltrud Strasser, Vet. Med

For most of us today, the horse is purely a means of pleasure and sport. There is no longer any acceptable reason to maintain this expectation of the horse being “ever ready” to use, regardless of, and often beyond, its biological limitations. Using the horse in such a way could even be regarded as inhumane, as it ultimately leads to a myriad of physical problems and dramatically shortening its lifespan.

**“It seems, indeed, a monstrosity of injustice that after the use of his feet has been taken from him he should be abused because he can’t go.”**

- Dr. Bracy Clark, Royal Veterinary College of London 1809.



Left – barefoot endurance. Courtesy Dr S Roberts BVSc (ACT)

Above – barefoot jumping. Courtesy Anawa Performance Horses (Tas)

Below – barefoot natural herd lifestyle. Courtesy Stevley Park Natural Barefoot Agistment (Vic)



### **Natural lifestyle and healthy bare hooves – the connection**

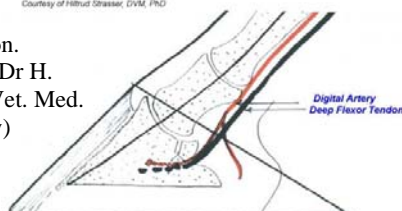
In order for a horse to have healthy, functioning bare hooves it must also have a lifestyle which supports overall good health.

Horses kept alone, or horses living in restrictive areas such as stables, small yards or small paddocks do not have the conditions they require as a species for overall good health – or for truly healthy feet that can function without metal shoes.

## Physical health

The horse's heart is very small for its body size; hence the heart is supported via the pumping action ("hoof mechanism") of each hoof. Therefore the horse requires constant movement and hooves that function correctly, not only to assist with the circulation of the body but also to provide nutrients for the growing hoof capsule.

Courtesy of Hiltrud Strasser, DVM, PhD



Circulation.  
Courtesy Dr H. Strasser Vet. Med. (Germany)

In order for the hooves to function correctly they must be unencumbered with metal horse shoes, and have correct form, either by being able to wear naturally on the terrain the horse lives and works on, or trimmed in a physiologically correct way.

### Natural lifestyle horses' bare hooves:

- Can be conditioned to work hard without wearing away – Growth = Wear
- Are able to feel the ground – safer for horse and rider
- Reversibly deform to dissipate concussion (shod horse walking on pavement receives three times the concussion of a barefoot horse trotting on pavement)
- Are not flat and have some flexibility – better traction on all surfaces



Hoof should be flexible and not flat. Courtesy J. Leitl (Vic)

- Will function as a circulatory pump supporting the whole system
- Are less likely to ever suffer from debilitating lameness

- Are alert to injury immediately due to correct nerve function (shod feet can hide damage over the longer term)

## Psychological health

Horses evolved over 60 million years as a herd/prey animal and even thousands of years of selective breeding has not altered their needs as a species. There are well known benefits associated with a herd lifestyle. Horses able to live with at least one or two others and out on pasture are far less likely to ever develop vices bought on by the stress and anxiety created when they are forced to live on their own.

### Natural lifestyle horses can:

- Rest lying down whilst others stand guard – safety in numbers

Courtesy J. Leitl (Vic)



- Play and develop their natural social hierarchy and behaviours
- Practice their flight response – action/reaction
- Graze naturally, eating as they need to (hunger causes stress)
- Move freely – run or roll (confinement = stress i.e. crib biting, wind sucking and weaving)
- Enjoy mutual grooming sessions
- Form strong bonds – hang out with their friends

### Other benefits of bare hooves

- Cause far less damage to the environment
- Are less dangerous to other horses and people in the event of a strike or kick
- Are less dangerous to the rider in the event of a fall

- No risk of major damage to the hoof capsule when a shoe is accidentally ripped off
- Pose no risk of damage to the sensitive corium tissue from metal nails or the hoof capsule from nail holes
- Pose less risk of hoof capsule deformation causing bone damage and/or bone remodelling
- Can generally be maintained by the horse owner, saving time and money
- Suffer far less concussion on the joints (metal shoes remove up to 70% of the natural shock absorbing capacity of the hoof capsule)
- Suffer less stress on the limbs and muscles via the added weight of the metal shoe (extra weight changes the centripetal forces of the limb)
- Make ridden horses more balanced, less prone to slip on any surface, and much lighter on their feet.

Paradoxically, horses living in a herd should not wear metal shoes because of the severe damage they can inflict on other horses during play or scuffles.

## REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

1. Jackson, Jaime: "The Natural Horse" Available at [www.star-ridge.com](http://www.star-ridge.com)
2. Strasser, Hiltrud Dr Vet. Med: "A Lifetime of Soundness" (1998) and "Shoeing: A Necessary Evil?" (2000) Kells, Canada. Available at [www.ausequinearts.com](http://www.ausequinearts.com)

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