

# DONKEY **HOOF CARE**

How to keep your donkeys feet healthy.

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Donkeys' feet are very different to horses' hooves as they have adapted to survive in a dry environment.

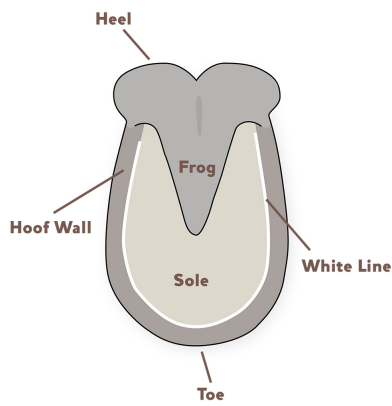
Donkeys thrive in semi-arid parts of the world, where the ground is dry and stony. Their feet are much more efficient than horses at absorbing water, but this means that when donkeys are kept in lush, wet pastures or damp, muddy environments their feet can become soft and they often suffer from foot diseases.

Therefore, our parent charity, The Donkey Sanctuary, has produced this resource on the importance of correct hoof care.

## THE STRUCTURE OF A DONKEY'S FOOT

Your farrier or vet will use the following terms to refer to different parts of a donkeys hoof, when explaining any problems to you:

- The 'hoof wall' is the hard outer surface. It is made of keratin (the same substance as human nails) and surrounds the foot and provides a protective outer layer
- The 'sole' is the bottom part of the foot
- The 'white line' is the area that connects the sole to the hoof wall on the underside of the foot
- The 'toe' is the front part of the foot, while the 'heel' is the back part
- The 'frog' is the central triangular area in the lower part of the foot, which is particularly sensitive. You should avoid frogs when cleaning hooves with a hoof cleaner.



## HOW ARE DONKEY FEET **DIFFERENT TO HORSES?**

There are a number of differences between horse and donkey feet.

- Donkeys' feet are more upright (between 5° and 10° more) than horses' feet
- The donkey foot is "boxier" than the horse foot (the horse's foot is more conical)
- The sole is more U-shaped (the sole of a horse's foot is more round)
- Donkeys' feet appear to grow more from the heel than from the other parts of the foot
- The donkey grows nearly as much sole as hoof wall and this needs paring by the farrier (in horses the sole growth tends to flake off).

## ROUTINE **FOOT CARE**

To help keep your donkey's hooves in good health, you need to provide good management and routine care. This will help prevent the likelihood of certain conditions developing.

Keep your donkey's hooves as dry as possible. It is not always possible to keep hooves dry when donkeys are outdoors, but the humidity could cause foot problems. Avoid leaving your donkey in very muddy or wet terrain. If possible, provide the donkeys with a dry, well-drained outdoor area in winter, such as a sand paddock.

Your donkey's stable or shelter should have an area with a solid concrete floor. Keep your donkey's bedding clean and dry, and avoid letting your donkeys stay on damp bedding for long periods.

All donkeys should have their feet picked out daily using a hoof pick. Be careful to keep the donkeys foot low and do not lift a donkey's foot too high, this make it more comfortable for the donkey and mean that they are less likely to kick. Especially in older animals with arthritis, it can be painful to lift and twist the leg. If necessary, bend your knees so that you and the donkey are comfortable. Picking our your donkey's feet will allow you to remove mud or stones and check for any damage or indication of a foot condition.

Check your donkey daily for signs of lameness. Remember that donkeys are stoic, meaning they hide signs of pain, so lameness may be subtle even in the presence of painful foot conditions. Contact your vet if you notice lameness in your donkey.

Lameness is a sign of pain. Don't wait until the next day to contact a vet if your donkey is lame.

Your farrier should visit every six to ten weeks. It is important to establish a good relationship with the farrier and a good start is to ensure the donkey is tied up in a well-lit area with freshly picked out feet and excess mud washed off the limbs. You are the client and if you are not happy with the standard of work you should seek the services of another farrier.

If your vet recommends foot bindings, make sure you are able to do it correctly. Ask your vet to explain and show you how to apply the bandage correctly and find out how often it needs to be changed. You may be advised to apply poultice to your donkey's foot. A poultice is a dressing that will help resolve the infection, should your donkey develop a foot abscess. Your vet will explain how to do this if necessary.

## TRIMMING DONKEY HOOVES

Choose a farrier who is familiar with working with donkeys and aware of the anatomical characteristics of their hoof. An experienced farrier must know the behaviour of the donkey, so that he can carry out the job calmly and without stress even if your donkey is nervous or inexperienced with trimming.

Regular trimming will keep the hoof well balanced and the right length, with a concave sole. The hoof wall will support the weight of your donkey.

For some foot issues, “corrective farriery” interventions will be necessary to bring the feet back to good health. This may leave the hoof a different shape than normal as your farrier will trim any abnormal parts of the hoof. Over time, the hoof will grow back healthy. Your farrier will be able to advise you on the management of your donkey if he has a foot problem.

If your donkey’s hooves have overgrown, the farrier may need to see an x-ray of the foot to guide their work. The x-ray will show the internal structures of the foot and help determine the severity of certain foot issues. Only a veterinarian can take x-rays, so if necessary, your farrier will work together with your veterinarian.

## MORE **INFORMATION**

If you can’t find what you’re looking for, our skilled and experience team of welfare advisers are on hand to give advice and appropriate support during office hours. [Please contact us by email.](#)