

How to Safely Bandage your Horse

Dr. Natasha Hovanessian, Canberra Equine Hospital

CANBERRA Equine HOSPITAL



First layer

Unfortunately horses can be pretty good at injuring themselves and requiring limb bandages, but bandages can do more harm than good when applied incorrectly. Slipped bandages, uneven pressure, too little padding, starting and finishing too high or low and allowing the bandage to become wet are some of the problems we see.

Bandages are great for providing protection for the wound from environmental contamination and flies, absorption of wound discharge, reduction of limb swelling, reduce limb movement and an environment which supports wound healing. Bandaged wounds often heal faster than non-bandaged but only if there is a healthy, clean wound under the wrapping.

No matter where it's placed, a bandage should consist of 3 layers- the primary/contact layer, the secondary/intermediate layer and the tertiary/outer layer. Finally an adhesive is placed over the top.

The first layer is the most important layer. Dependant on the type of wound, we can choose between **adherent or non-adherent and absorbent or non-absorbent dressings**. Often we try to create a moist wound healing environment which allows the wound fluids and the growth factors, which help to close the wound, to remain in contact with the wound to provide a faster healing.



Second layer (cotton)

The second layer absorbs fluids, bacteria and dead material from the wound and **should be at least 2 to 3 layers thick**. This is also important to protect the wound against further trauma and to prevent excessive movement, which will delay the wound's ability to granulate and heal. **For this layer, we use cotton wool or combine padding and generally wrap from the outside of the leg inward.**

The third layer needs to be of a stiffer material to hold the previous layers in place and prevent sliding of the bandage on the wound. A slipping bandage disrupts the cells trying to heal across the wound. It is important to ensure there is even pressure in this layer and it also wraps from the outside of the leg inward. The bottom and the top end of the cotton are left uncovered to avoid creating pressure points. We generally use **brown crepe gauze** for this layer because Vetwrap (the stretchy coloured stuff!) can constrict and tighten on the leg.

Finally you cover the uncovered ends with an adhesive layer (Elastoplast) to keep everything in place. Start on the actual bandage and work yourself to the skin not the other way round. This prevents shavings or dirt entering between the skin and bandage. Often we cover the entire bandage with Elastoplast.



Third layer - see how the top and the bottom part stay uncovered

General Principles when Applying a Bandage

Make sure that each round you make around the leg with your bandage material overlaps the previous one about one third to half width. This gives the bandage more stability. Also make sure that you go into the same direction with each layer. Wrap the bandage clockwise from the outside to the inside around the leg.

Always take care that you follow the normal structures of the limb and that the thickness of your bandage does not vary. This could cause sore spots because the pressure isn't equal in all parts of the bandage.

Also make sure that your horse doesn't move around too much when the bandage is on because it can slip and cause pressure on prominent areas on the limb.

Work yourself from joint to joint and never stop halfway because this may cause pressure on the underlying tissues.

If you are not sure which materials to use for the bandage, don't hesitate to ask your vet for advice. Next edition we will go through how to bandage common injury sites.

For further information or any queries regarding your horse's health, please contact us on (02) 6241 8888 or equine@canberravet.com.au.



Final adhesive layer



Fixation of the top end of the bandage to the skin- remember to start on the bandage