

*courtesy of AAEP.com*

Your horse has been fitted with a cast to give it the best possible chance of recovery. A cast provides both protection and support and thereby gives the horse's injury a chance to heal.

Because you can't actually see what's happening beneath a cast, caring for a convalescent horse can seem a bit daunting. You can ease your mind and decrease the chances of complications by knowing what to watch for and what to do. You'll also keep your horse more comfortable and help speed healing. Careful observation will be your best tool.

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### Your Horse's Cast

Casts are used for a variety of problems such as some bone fractures, tendon and ligament injuries, wounds, and abnormal growth and development.



Several important functions are:

- First Aid Tool
- Immobilization of Limbs
- Overcoming Tension – keeping skin from pulling apart at wound sites
- Rigid Support – allows horse to stand and use limb during convalescence
- Protection and Reduced Concussion to Limb
- External Support – reinforcement for internal fixation devices such as plates or screws used in fracture repair

### Better Technology

Fortunately for your horse, casting materials and techniques have greatly improved over the years. Today, casts are generally made of lightweight fiberglass or plaster. They conform well to the horse's anatomy, set quickly, and are durable, strong and porous.

A well-constructed cast permits the skin to breathe, the wound to drain, and is comfortable for the horse. Horses normally adjust quickly to wearing a cast.

The type of cast will depend on the nature and location of the injury.

- Full Cast – includes the foot and extends the length of the limb to just below the elbow or stifle.
- Sleeve/Tube Cast – partial cast that generally covers only a portion of the limb but does not encase the foot (usually immobilizes the knee or hock).
- Half Limb/Distal Limb Cast – extends from below the knee or hock down to include the foot.
- Short Cast/Foot Cast – starts below the fetlock joint and covers the foot.

### Symptoms For Concern

While your horse is in a cast, you will need to pay extra close attention to it. Check your horse several times a day, paying special attention to the cast area. Contact your veterinarian immediately if you observe any of the following:

1. Increased pain or lameness
2. Discharge (exudates) from the cast that has a foul odor, unusual color or seems to be excessive
3. Swelling above or below the cast
4. Focal warmth (noticeable heat emitting from the cast)
5. Elevated body temperature (100F + or – 1 is considered normal)
6. Chewing at, or other apparent irritation with the cast
7. Recumbency – horse spends an abnormal amount of time lying down
8. Secondary Wounds – rub sites or pressure sores that develop where the cast contacts the skin
9. Cast damage or breakage
10. Lack of appetite or depression

### Doctor's Orders

While your horse is in a cast, follow your veterinarian's instructions to the letter.

1. Prevent excessive movement by keeping your horse confined to a stall.
2. Check the horse regularly.
3. Keep the horse's environment scrupulously clean and dry to prevent contamination of the cast or wound.
4. Seal the cast openings with bandaging tape (not too tight) to prevent dirt and debris from entering it. Check and change as required.
5. If the cast becomes excessively dirty or wet, contact your veterinarian. Follow cleaning and drying instructions explicitly.
6. Give medications only as prescribed by your equine practitioner.
7. Do not provide drugs or pain relievers that could mask a horse's condition – unless

specifically directed to do so by your veterinarian.

8. Do not trailer your horse while in a cast without express permission and guidance from your veterinarian.

9. Stay in close communication with your equine practitioner for guidance in monitoring and evaluating your horse's progress.

### **Your Health Care Partnership**

Be assured that your equine practitioner will do everything in his or her power to help you get your horse out of a cast and back to work as soon as possible. If you have questions or need more information on cast care management, contact your veterinarian.

This information was produced through a joint venture between 3M Animal Care Products and The American Association of Equine Practitioners.