[Keeping Horse Legs Safe: Bandages, Boots, and Wraps](http://cha-ahse.org/store/blog/Keeping_Horse_Legs.html)

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*By Sarah Evers Conrad*

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Whether a horse is being used for jumping, eventing, dressage, reining, cattle work, trail riding, riding lessons, camp programs, or just as a pleasure horse, one thing is certain – they work hard, and so do their legs. The legs of a horse are certainly amazing. They take on extreme amounts of stress, bear a lot of weight, can move quickly so that the horse can change directions on a dime or jump over an obstacle, and they are one of the most important parts of the horse. Protecting a horse’s legs is imperative in certain situations, especially if the horse is young and still growing.

Horses that are faced with poor footing, uneven ground, a competition environment, transportation, or have a tendency to stock up (or have their legs swell) while in a stall, can benefit from leg wraps, boots, or bandages. It is important to know when and how to use each kind so that the horse’s legs are protected properly. Using leg wraps and boots incorrectly can cause problems for the horse and could accidentally put more strain on the horse’s legs and cause damage, such as inflammation of the flexor tendon and the flexor tendon sheath, which is sometimes known as the “bandage bow.”

**Skid Boots:** Skid boots are for use on the hind legs during work, especially if a horse has a tendency to catch one leg with another leg or hoof. They are popular in western events, such as cutting, reining, and cattle work. Skid boots protect the lower legs, fetlock joint, and pasterns.

**Bell Boots:** Bell boots fit around and underneath the fetlock and Velcro in place. Some can even be pulled on, and these may be used if the ones with Velcro cause chafing or do not fit the horse well. Proper fit means that the rider can put two fingers between the bell boot and the pastern at the top opening, and they should cover the heel bulbs. Bell boots are used when a horse has a tendency of overstepping/overreaching, which could then cause him to catch the back of his front hoof or coronet and cut or bruise himself. In addition, the horse could pull off a shoe, along with part of the hoof. Horses that have studs on their shoes also benefit from the use of bell boots so that the studs do not injure the horse if he catches himself. Bell boots can also be used during turnout or shipping or when being ridden.

**Tendon Boots:** These boots have elastic straps across the front and hook closures while padding protects the tendons and ligaments on the sides and backs of the leg from a strike from the back hooves. They are popular among jumpers since the open front helps the horse feel a pole if he strikes it with his foreleg. In addition, the open design allows additional air flow. They are only used on the front legs.

**Fetlock Boots:**These boots are used to protect the fetlocks on the hind legs and may be used with tendon boots. They are also open in the front.

**Sports Medicine Boots:** These boots can be used during exercise to protect the muscles and tendons, as well as the pastern and fetlock. Sports medicine boots are most commonly used to protect the horse from muscle and tendon strains and sprains, suspensory injuries, and splints. Many riders tend to only put boots on the front legs. However, the hind legs can also be susceptible to injury. In addition, by booting all four legs, support is even on each leg, and it may help the horse bear weight more evenly.

**Splint Boots or Brushing Boots:** Splint boots or brushing boots help prevent injury during exercise, especially if one hoof strikes an opposite leg, and are easier to put on than wraps. They come in handy with horses that are less coordinated or in training for faster events. They can also be used in turnout, especially if a horse is extra exuberant when playing. They sit right on top of the fetlock joint. Fit and proper placement is important to prevent injury. To learn how to put on bell boots, sports medicine boots, and splint boots, check out CHA's Safety Short Video titled ["Fitting Horse Boots"](http://bit.ly/1pLy7cQ) on YouTube.

**Polo Wraps:** Polo wraps are stretchy, available in various colors and lengths, and help protect the horse’s legs from scrapes, bruises, and irritation from dirt, sand, and other types of arena footing. However, polos, also called track wraps, should not be used during trail riding since burrs and small sticks and debris can become attached to them and then cause the horse irritation as they dig into his skin. They are not recommended for use when putting the horse in a stall for a while or in turnout since they can easily become unraveled and torn if the horse steps on them. Many choose polo wraps over boots since they conform to the leg, however, if they become wet, they become really heavy for the horse. This can place additional strain on tendons and ligaments. Applying polo wraps incorrectly can also damage the horse’s leg. Polo wraps should be washed often since a dirty polo wrap can irritate a horse’s legs. For proper placement, check out CHA’s video called [“How to Put Polo Wraps and Standing Wraps on Horses.”](http://bit.ly/VFXBvQ)

**Standing Wraps:** Standing wraps, also called stable bandages, consist of padding that is wrapped around the horse’s legs using polo wraps. They help protect the horse’s legs, tendons, and ligaments, while the horse is in a stall. Standing wraps can be beneficial if a horse has a tendency to be restless in the stall, or if the horse’s legs tends to stock up (swell) after exercise or while in a stall. They can also be used in shipping, although shipping boots provide better protection. In addition, they can be used for certain injuries, but this should be at the discretion of a veterinarian. Using a wrap can help keep cuts, wounds, and other injuries clean while they heal. In addition, standing wraps are beneficial when poultices or liniments need to be used, again at the discretion of a veterinarian. A veterinarian should advise on the use of standing wraps with any product, since some products can produce excessive heat, thus causing the horse discomfort or pain if used under a wrap. Standing wraps stretch from the bottom of the knee or hock to below the fetlock and are always used with padding.

**Shipping Bandages, Boots, or Wraps:** Shipping boots, bandages, and wraps are used when trailering and flying to prevent injuries to the legs. Shipping boots and wraps go from the knee or hock down to the hoof. Shipping boots can provide more protection than shipping wraps since they cover the hock and some even have hoof guards. They protect the cannon bones, tendons, fetlocks, pasterns, coronets, and heels. As with other boots, bandages, and wraps, make sure to clean the horse's legs and the boot and wrap so that the horse does not become irritated from trapped dirt, shavings, or other obstructions. Poorly applied shipping bandages and wraps have the possibility of coming loose and falling off. In addition, they could strain the horse’s legs. Wraps are best for long trips, while boots are great for short trips or for those who do not know how to properly put on a shipping wrap.

It is possible to go on and on about wraps, boots, and bandages. There is a plethora of options on the market, and each company may have a unique take on the design. In addition, the names of boots may vary from discipline to discipline and also differ by country.

The most important thing about using wraps, boots, and bandages is to apply them properly and to use them in the right situations. Proper fit is important as well. It may take trial and error to find the right options for a particular horse, but the benefits are worth the effort. After all, no rider wants to hear that their horse has turned up lame.

- See more at: http://cha-ahse.org/store/blog/keeping\_horse\_legs.html#sthash.nIup1rLe.dpuf