

Navicular Disease – Navicular Syndrome
ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE
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NAVICULAR DISEASE

What is it?

Navicular disease may be diagnosed a little more often than it really appears. We prefer to refer to it among the ‘distal limb degenerative’ diseases. The diagnosis usually strikes horror into any who hear it, fearing the eventual worst for their horse.

In natural medicine, we are not so fearful, as a result of past experience. Such a large proportion of past cases treated by the AVMC have come back into full work without drugs, that we are unable to proffer a grave prognosis.

It is characterised clinically, early on, by a history of vague lameness and stumbling, later by ‘easing’ of the heel of the affected foot and eventually by narrowing and hardening of the foot. The ‘easing’ is commonly called ‘pointing’. It is done to ease pressure on the deep digital flexor tendon and on the navicular bone, which acts as a ‘pulley’ for that tendon.

How does it occur?

This is not well-known. Any process, which interferes with normal function of the foot can lead to the problem developing. Damage to the circulation of the foot and damage to the flexibility of the foot are the two main possibilities (flexibility is closely linked to circulation, since the normal foot acts as a pump, widening and contracting with each foot fall and lift). If the circulation is damaged, flexibility will suffer and *vice versa*. This is the mechanism for a vicious spiral of worsening problems. [Saddling](#) affects forelimb movement and [shoeing](#) affects the stresses undergone by the feet. Add these two factors together, if they are less than optimal, and you have a potent recipe for disaster. If the [diet](#) is not optimal, that will add to the situation. We have no evidence

either for this disease being hereditary or for it being inevitable in certain 'types' of horse. It appears to be mainly man-made.

Is it responsive to treatment?

In conventional medicine, the usual resort is to long-term use of warfarin-type medication, to thin the blood and an anti-inflammatory drug to reduce pain. Apart from the possibility of side-effects, these drugs offer little prospect of resolution. In more extreme cases, we have seen cutting of tendons (desmotomy) and de-nerving (neurectomy) of the foot. We cannot advise either of these measures, on humane grounds.

In natural medicine, we attempt both to restore balance and normal function to the bone recycling and remodelling processes and to stimulate healing. We also attempt to stimulate healthy regeneration of bone, by the use of specially-made homeopathic remedies ([homeopathy](#)). In some cases, [acupuncture](#) has proved necessary. All cases benefit from [chiropractic manipulation](#) and a [healthy diet](#) is vital for healthy skeletal recycling and remodelling in the longer term.

This programme would not be effective in itself, long-term, powerful though these measures are. We must also try to eliminate the very processes which gave rise to the navicular disease in the first place, at the same time modifying diet for healthier metabolism. Hence, at the AVMC, we place emphasis on saddling and shoeing, which are vital components of therapy. **If the treatment is successful**, normal function and health can usually be restored, subject to continuing concentration on a full holistic health programme. We have seen the vast majority of previous navicular patients return to full work, including jumping in many cases, without problems and we have had the good fortune to follow some of these for many years thereafter. We do not, however, have 'before & after' X-ray pictures, to record the effects on bone regeneration. This would make an interesting study, in successful cases, but may seem like tempting fate to an owner who has been through this harrowing problem.

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