

How to treat scratches

Relieve this problem with gentle cleansing, thorough drying and lots of greasy ointment.

A common skin condition, scratches is fairly easy to identify. It appears as cracked, inflamed skin and crusted scabs on a horse's pastern. It occurs when natural skin oils are

lost to harsh environmental factors: mud; cold, windy weather; low humidity; frequent bathing. Scratches is painful and subject to bacterial infection. The majority of cases respond to the treat-

ment outlined here. Some severe cases require a systemic antibiotic. If your ministrations yield no improvement in two days or you have concerns, call your veterinarian.



1

Use sharp scissors to trim the pastern hair—which may look ruffled—to about a half-inch. Don't use clippers for this job. They can gouge the skin and scatter tiny hair fragments into the cracks.



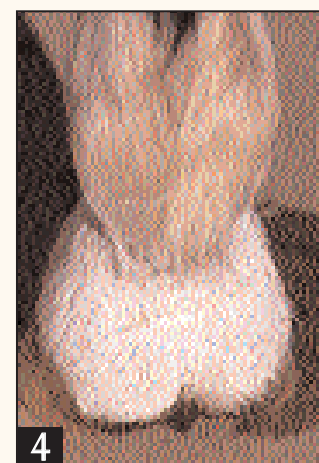
2

Wash the area with water and a mild cleaner—Ivory Liquid or Betadine scrub. Gently loosen crusty buildup with a folded gauze pad. Some scabs may remain. However, a thick scab that envelops the pastern must be removed. Refer to Step 5.



3

Use clean towels to dry the leg thoroughly. A hair dryer will help to evaporate every bit of moisture that could cause more chapping and make it difficult for medication to stick.



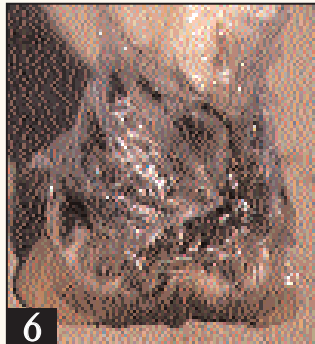
4

If you see signs of infection—thick, yellow pus; swollen, inflamed skin—spread Neosporin, bacitracin or a triple-antibiotic cream recommended by your veterinarian on the area. Top with a thick layer of a greasy ointment—Desitin, Vaseline or ichthammol—to ease pain, protect the skin and speed healing. Omit the antibacterial treatment if there is no infection. Until the pastern is healed, gently wipe off accumulated dirt and all the medication once or twice a day, then reapply the ointments.



5

To painlessly remove a thick and extensive scab, first generously slather the pastern with ichthammol.



6

Apply plastic wrap around the leg, covering the ichthammol.



7

Cover the plastic with a cotton leg quilt and wrap the leg in a standing bandage. The scabs should slide off easily after 24 hours. The area can then be washed, dried and covered with greasy ointment (refer to Steps 2 through 4).