

Cinder Hill Equine Clinic



Splints

What are they?

‘Splints’ refer to a hard, boney swelling that appears on the inside (or occasionally outside) of the horse’s lower leg. They are caused by damage to the splint bones or the ligament between the splint and cannon bone. They are common in younger horses in training but can occur at any age. They may be the direct result of a knock to the bone or occur from excessive concussion on hard ground.

What should I do?

First and foremost, consult your vet, particularly if the horse is lame. Some splints can be small and relatively non-painful, whilst others can be quite sore. New splints are often surrounded by soft tissue swelling and may be painful to touch.

What will the vet do?

Your vet will be likely to palpate the area carefully and ask to see the horse walked and trotted. They may then advise radiography (X-ray), to rule out a fracture of the splint bone, and to see how extensive the splint is. If no fracture is found, then splints will often do very well with conservative management alone. This involves a period of rest, and anti-inflammatories if your horse is quite sore. There are a variety of different lotions and creams available to reduce the inflammation and improve healing of a splint. Seek advice from your vet as to which may be of benefit in your case.

What happens next?

It is possible that there will be a boney lump visible in the location of the splint for the rest of your horse’s life. These are usually purely of cosmetic concern. Very occasionally, a splint will be so large that it impinges on the suspensory ligament which runs down the back of the leg. In these rare cases, surgery may be suggested to reduce the size of the splint. In the vast majority of cases, the prognosis for horses to continue in their athletic career is excellent.