

(The following is my contribution to a multi-author article in *Equine Wellness* on natural therapies for muscle injuries.)

Movement as Therapy

Horses are designed to move. All body systems and processes work better when the horse moves throughout the day than when he is immobile. While rest from vigorous activity is important following injury, strict confinement is seldom the best idea. In fact with soft tissue injuries, strict confinement beyond the first few days is a great recipe for fibrosis (scarring) within and between tissues, which can result in a chronic gait abnormality.

The goal when dealing with an injury such as a muscle tear is to engage the healing tissue (i.e. get it doing what it is designed to do) while staying well within the current loading capacity of the compromised tissue. It is important that the rehab nor cause any further tissue damage. But it is equally important that the tissue be engaged while it is healing, so that the repair process is kept geared toward restoring normal function rather than just doing a patch job.

Depending on the injury, the horse, the facilities, and the footing, sometimes pasture turnout is the best form of rehab. Other times, though, stall or paddock confinement with frequent hand-walking is best. Provided that walking will not aggravate the injury, hand-walking should begin within the first few days of injury. As healing progresses, the duration and then the intensity of the exercise sessions are gradually increased, using the horse's comfort as a guide.

(Note: an accurate diagnosis should be made before any rehab begins. If the injury involves complete rupture of a structure, then movement should be restricted until the compromised region is stabilised.)

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