



White Line Disease | Wall Separation

Introduction:

White line disease is when the area between the sole and the hoof capsule wall is dysfunctional and this causes structural changes in the tissue makeup of this area leading to separation of the wall and sole.

Overview:

The white line's job is to allow for expansion between the hoof wall and the sole as well as preventing infection from entering the inner hoof. A normal white line should follow the circumference of the hoof wall and down the bars to finish two-thirds of the way down the frog. It should be opaque in colour with a width at about 3mm wide. The texture of the white line should be tight so you cannot easily see lines in it. If you have a white line that is not opaque, but yellow or red in colour then this is a sign of blood leeching into it from the sensitive laminae, meaning that the connection between the hoof capsule and the pedal bone is under stress. When we see a white line incomplete in an area this will indicate stress in that area and a weak spot between the wall and sole, plus an entry point for infection. When the white line is wider at one point (usually the toe area or site of a hoof wall flare) this indicates a stretching of the sensitive laminae.

The separation can involve a considerable amount of capsule and in some cases extend up the capsule wall and could cause structural integrity or mechanical failure of the hoof.

Animals Response:

As every animal is an individual they can respond in many different ways when they have a problem in the white line of the hoof. Some horses will become extremely sore or lame with just the first indications of any problems while other can show no signs of soreness and remain sound with an advanced amount of separation of the white line. It will depend on the animal and the amount of infection that gets in behind the hoof capsule wall as to how the animal deals with the problem.

What Can You Do?

These changes in the white line tend to be through an imbalance in the feet and the breaking down of the tissue usually happens over a long period of time and then just seems to suddenly appear in the foot. When any of these changes persist you should have your horses checked by a qualified professional to ensure correct orthopaedic balance.

As for the treatment of this complaint it depends on the amount and the depth of the damage to the foot. If it is mild, then a good rebalancing of the foot will usually fix the problem, however if the damage to the foot is deep and the infection is in behind the wall you should pack the opening with copper sulphate and cotton wool impregnated with hoof grease. The copper sulphate will kill the germ and the cotton wool will prevent anything from being forced up inside the hole. It is not recommended to open up this area of the hoof wall and leave open as removing the hoof wall will only cause more strain and stress to the inner tissue and prolong healing of the structures involved.

Have the feet rebalanced on a regular basis of about 5 week intervals and monitor the progress to ensure the damage is growing out and the foot is becoming healthy again.

Please contact your veterinary consultant if you have any major concerns.

