



What Is Navicular Syndrome?

Navicular syndrome—more accurately referred to as podotrochlosis—is a complex condition affecting the horse's foot, particularly the navicular bone and surrounding structures. It's often characterized by chronic lameness, typically in the front feet. Podotrochlosis is not an isolated injury but a spectrum of issues involving the navicular bone and the associated bursa, tendons, and ligaments.

The navicular bone is a small, flattened bone located in the back of the foot, sandwiched between the deep flexor tendon and the coffin bone. It plays a vital role in the mechanics of the foot. When damaged or aggravated, it can lead to the inflammation of the surrounding structures, causing the horse significant discomfort.

Several factors can contribute to the development of navicular syndrome, including conformation, improper shoeing, mechanical stress, and repeated strain on the foot.



Clinical Signs

The insidious nature of navicular syndrome means signs might not be obvious until the condition progresses. However, clinical signs to watch for include:

- Lameness on hard ground.
- Lameness while turning.

- A shortened or rough stride.
- Heel pain.
- Weight shifting from foot to foot.
- Occasionally, toe pointing.

The most commonly affected types of horses are Quarter Horse, Thoroughbred, and Warmblood geldings between the ages of 4 and 15.



Diagnosis

A navicular diagnosis requires a thorough lameness exam by a veterinarian, which typically involves flexion tests, hoof tests to localize the source of pain to the navicular region, nerve blocking, and diagnostic imaging. Radiographs (X-rays) and, in some cases, more advanced imaging technologies like MRI can offer detailed views of the navicular region, detecting issues such as bone remodeling, cyst formation, or soft tissue changes.



Treatment and Management

Navicular syndrome has no cure; however, you can work with your veterinarian and farrier to manage and alleviate the clinical signs, aiming to improve the horse's comfort and mobility. Therapeutic options include:

- **Corrective shoeing:** Trimming and shoeing techniques, such as egg-bar shoes or wedge pads, can help support and balance the foot and alter the horse's breakover to reduce

stress on the navicular region.

- **Medications and injections:** Your veterinarian might administer non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) to manage pain and inflammation. In some cases, he or she might recommend injecting the joint or navicular bursa with corticosteroids, polysulfated glycosaminoglycan (PSGAG), and/or hyaluronic acid for more targeted relief. Veterinarians also often administer affected horses bisphosphonates, which are drugs designed to reduce bone remodeling and the pain associated with it.
- **Complementary therapies:** Therapies such as acupuncture and shock wave therapy can help manage your horse's pain.

Early intervention can significantly impact a navicular horse's prognosis and athletic ability. Delaying treatment or mismanaging the condition can lead to chronic issues and, in extreme cases, necessitate surgery and/or retirement from certain activities.



When to Call Your Vet

Contact your veterinarian:

- If your horse displays gait changes, discomfort, or any of the abovementioned clinical signs.
- If your horse's lameness is persistent or gets progressively worse.
- If your horse's current treatment and shoeing plan is no longer effective.