



What Is Ringbone?

Ringbone refers to osteoarthritis or bony growth that occurs in the pastern (proximal interphalangeal) or coffin (distal interphalangeal) joints of the horse. There are two primary types:

- **High Ringbone:** Occurs in the pastern joint, located between the long and short pastern bones.
- **Low Ringbone:** Occurs in the coffin joint, located between the short pastern bone and the coffin bone inside the hoof.

Ringbone can develop due to trauma, poor conformation (such as upright pasterns or an angular limb deformity), repetitive strain, excessive weight, or improper shoeing. Over time, stress and inflammation lead to new bone formation around the affected joint as the body tries to stabilize it.



Clinical Signs

The signs of ringbone can vary depending on its severity and location but commonly include:

- **Lameness:** Intermittent or consistent, often worse after exercise.
- **Visible swelling:** Especially with high ringbone, a hard, bony enlargement might be seen or felt around the pastern.
- **Decreased flexibility:** The horse might be stiff or reluctant to flex the affected limb.
- **Heat and pain:** Early in the condition, the joint area might be warm and

sensitive to touch.

- **Gait abnormalities:** The horse might have shortened strides or reduced performance under saddle.



Diagnosis

An accurate diagnosis is key to managing ringbone effectively. A veterinarian typically performs:

- **Physical examination:** Palpating the affected area for swelling, heat, and pain.
- **Flexion tests:** Flexing the limb to exacerbate pain and highlight lameness.
- **Nerve blocks:** Temporarily numbing specific areas to localize the source of pain.
- **Radiographs (X-rays):** The definitive tool to visualize bony changes, joint space narrowing, or osteophyte (bone spur) formation.
- **Advanced imaging (optional):** MRI or CT scans can provide detailed images, which are especially useful for detecting early-stage low ringbone within the hoof capsule.



Treatment and Management

Ringbone is a progressive condition. While it cannot be cured, it can often be managed successfully to maintain the horse's comfort and activity level. Treatment options include:

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as phenylbutazone or firocoxib, to help reduce pain and inflammation.

- Oral joint products such as glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate.
- Joint injections, such as corticosteroids and hyaluronic acid.
- Biologic therapies.
- Corrective shoeing to promote good hoof balance and easy breakover. Some horses might benefit from pads or glue-on shoes to minimize concussion.

In severe cases, especially with high ringbone, veterinarians might recommend fusing the joint either surgically (arthrodesis) or by injecting a substance to hasten the fusion process (facilitated ankylosis). This can allow some horses to return to work.

Manage affected horses by maintaining an appropriate weight, providing regular hoof care, and encouraging movement to keep their joints mobile without overstressing them.



When to Call Your Vet

You should call your veterinarian if you notice:

- Persistent or worsening lameness.
- Sudden swelling or heat around the pastern or hoof.
- Reluctance to move or bear weight on a limb.
- No improvement despite rest and supportive care.
- A need for advanced treatment options.