



Bandaging for Performance.



'Always take great care when bandaging your horse's legs. An incorrectly applied bandage can result in skin rubs and bandage bows over the superficial flexor tendon. Always use a pre-stretched roll of elastoplast and pull firmly from the cannon bone rather than from over the tendons.'

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Many of us who own and ride horses ask the question at one time or another should I bandage my horse's legs during work? Depending on who you asked you are likely to get different opinions often based on individual experience and not necessarily fact. As you are aware there are many bandaging products and leg boots on the market to choose from. Selecting the right product for your horse can be difficult and largely depends on your type of equine endeavour. Open 'shin' brushing boots largely provide protection from direct knocks or interference. Short fetlock boots help limit trauma to the 'bumpers' or back of the fetlock during exercise. The use of bandages or boots from below the knee to below the fetlock is common. The idea is to provide protection from interference or knocks and hopefully provide support to the tendons and ligaments of the lower leg. Given the fact that tendon and ligament injuries are common and a significant cause of wastage in all equine disciplines, it comes as no surprise that horse owners are willing to try to prevent such injuries by using these products. Over the past 5 years our knowledge of tendon and ligament injuries has expanded greatly and we now know that most bowed tendons and strained suspensory ligaments occur due to progressive weakening caused by ageing and the effects of repetitive exercise. While using bandages or boots may not prevent these degenerative processes from occurring, as veterinarians and as horse owners we have always hoped that they would help in some small way. Until recently there was no real evidence for or against bandaging horses legs. However, a group of researchers evaluated different bandaging techniques in the laboratory and found there was indeed some benefit in bandaging. The investigators found bandaging reduced peak vertical force at the fetlock joint during exercise and they concluded that bandaging may help protect tendons and ligaments during weight bearing. The bandaging technique used in the study consisted of a strip of elastoplast the same length as the leg from below the knee to the pastern. The elastoplast strip was cut in half lengthways at each end for a distance of about 10 cm to create 2 strips. The elastoplast was placed at the back of the cannon bone from below the knee to the pastern and the 2 strips at each end were taped around the front of the cannon bone and pastern respectively with the fetlock held in a flexed position. Elastoplast was then wrapped around the leg from below the knee to the pastern and stitched in place. The aim was to create a 'sling' to support the fetlock joint and reduce movement. Similarly another group of researchers evaluated a number of commercially available leg boots for horses. They found that the types of boots that extended from below the knee to the pastern and had a double strap wrapping underneath the fetlock reduced joint extension the greatest. While the degree of support or protection was found to be only small in both studies it provides some of the first real evidence in favour of using leg bandaging and support boots in horses.