

There are many ways to treat abscesses in equine hooves. With or without paring out an abscess, information on two of the most popular methods of drawing out an abscess are discussed below.

Ichthammol for Abscesses

Ichthammol is a sticky salve (a medicinal ointment for healing or relieving wounds and sores. anything that soothes, mollifies, or relieves) that is a derivative of coal tar that promotes drainage. Ichthammol is sometimes called "black ointment" or "drawing salve". Ichthammol is also known as ammonium bituminosulfonate or ammonium bituminosulphonate. The three main ingredients are: Ichthammol (a sulfurous coal tar), Yellow Soft Paraffin and Wool Fat (fats that provide a layer of oil on the surface to prevent water evaporation). Ichthammol is listed as a mild antiseptic. How Ichthammol works is not fully understood.

Human dermatologists say there is no evidence that Ichthammol draws out abscess or infections. One reason there is not much evidence on what Ichthammol can do is that they are basically just a folk remedy, said Dr. Alan S. Boyd, a professor of dermatology at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. "It seems that people have been taking their cues from veterinarians. Products like ichthammol have long been a go-to preparation for the treatment of abscesses on the bottom of horses' feet. The advice to clients with a foot sore horse is almost always to slather on the ichthammol."

Ichthammol, for example, traces back to the 19th century. And while there has not been much written about it, there are historical accounts of sulfonated shale oil being used to aid in wound healing that go back as far the 1400's. Then in the late 1800s, a dermatologist wrote about the salve, recommending its use in the treatment of eczema. To date there are no double-blind placebo-controlled trials to be found testing Ichthammol's efficacy.

There are also no systematic studies on the use of schist oil extracts such as ammonium bituminosulfonate and sodium bituminosulfonate as used as an abscess drawing salve. Ichthammol has no know affect with other medicines and does not seem to have any significant side effects in humans or horses.

Epsom Salts for Abscesses

Epsom salts can be used by soaking or foot poulticing. Soaking is done by placing the hoof in warm water with diluted Epsom salts (with diluted povidone-iodine best) for about 10 to 20 minutes, once or twice daily. A better and more effective use of Epsom salts is to use as a poultice. Epsom salt paste (magnesium sulfate) is usually bought in jars or tubes with other ingredients such as methyl salicylate and menthol. There are several methods to make your own Epsom salt paste with the most common way from Epsom salt and vegetable glycerin. Epsom salt looks similar to table salt but is a completely different compound. Epsom salt is made of both magnesium and sulfate, whereas table salt is sodium.

Epsom salt has reportedly been used for over 400 years, ever since an English farmer discovered that the “bitter water” in his wells had remarkable healing properties on skin rashes and injuries.

Epsom salts works on drawing out abscesses by a process called osmosis. Osmosis is the transport of water-soluble material through a semipermeable membrane from a region of high concentration to a region of low concentration. Epsom salts work by the imbalance in water concentration. For example, an abscess is more concentrated in the hoof than in Epsom salt. When you soak or use an Epsom salt poultice, the abscessed material moves out of the hoof into the lower-concentration region in the salt.

There are also no scientific studies verifying the efficacy of using Epsom salts soaks to treat hoof abscesses. Epsom salts does not seem to have any significant side effects when used for soaking or poulticing of abscesses.

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Epsom Salt Council - <https://www.epsomsaltcouncil.org/>

Epsom Salt for Infection – Effective Remedies to Treat Stubborn Infections

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