

# Robert McDowell's Herbal Treatments

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## Arthritis:

Arthritis is a diagnosis, which is loosely used for any sort of physical change showing up in joints or even unidentified lameness. The orthodox prognosis is that this is somehow not the fault of the handling or treatment of the animal, it is just a fact of life. It may somehow resolve itself but most likely not. Recommended treatment is with anti-inflammatory drugs like Bute and perhaps Calcium supplements.

All of this and the sense of helplessness, which goes along with it, is of course nonsense.

It is true that in old age the horses' structure (like ours) seems in many cases to stiffen up. It is also true that injuries incurred earlier in our lives can accelerate the loss of mobility and result in pain due to the progression of a process started back with the original injury. But none of this is really inevitable in the way we are encouraged to believe.

Our bodies are designed to repair themselves as they go along. Every tissue cell, including those forming muscles, bones, ligaments and scar tissue are replaced at regular intervals and there is no reason why this replacement process cannot lead toward resolution rather than toward progression of a structural problem.

To further complicate the arthritis diagnosis, particularly when nothing much shows up on the Xray, is the fact that there is a whole different class of problems, which are better, named rheumatic processes.

These may end up showing up in structural problems but they originate in blood quality problems. If the chemical balance within the blood is not maintained within a narrow range, the lubricating fluid in the joints, (which is formed from blood products) ceases to lubricate effectively. This causes inflammation and in the extreme an auto-immune response whereby the body actually attacks tissue within the joint and leads to severe degeneration, more correctly known as Rheumatoid Arthritis in humans. This is very rare in horses although increasingly common in dogs particularly some of the larger breeds.

These then are the processes:

As a Herbalist I have access to all those herbs used for thousands of years in a hundred different cultures to treat all stages of all these processes. As a Herbalist also I must use my common sense and look in a holistic way at the animals' history and circumstances.

It is from these considerations that I have developed a range of approaches to the problem called Arthritis.

Any physical injury or process involving dense tissue, including ligaments, ligament attachment points, bones and scar tissue is treated according to its state of progression.

In a younger animal with a recent injury free access to unimproved pastures and unrestricted exercise maybe all that is required. I formulate a Tendon and Bone treatment made from Millet, Linseed, Yarrow, Kelp and Comfrey extracted into Organic Cider Vinegar along with homeopathic remedies for shock to stimulate the healing process internally and provide exactly the correct nutrients for the complete rehabilitation of the injury. (Approaching this problem with a 'Calcium Supplement' is total nonsense and shows no understanding whatever of the processes involved)

Often I recommend an external treatment, which may consist of a poultice, cream, or oil aimed at

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improving circulation within the particular area thereby speeding up the body's ability to heal itself while providing some relief from inflammation and topical discouragement to excessive scar tissue formation either internally or externally. The herbs involved in such treatment are again Comfrey and Kelp but also include Wintergreen, Arnica, Rosemary, White Willow Bark and Linseed Oil along with the appropriate homeopathic treatments.

The healing resulting from this type of treatment will be spectacular in the speed and resolution of the injury. Six or eight weeks of treatment only before bringing the horse back into work and a rapid build-up to full workload.

At the other end of the scale with an older horse experiencing the Rheumatic problems of stiffness and pain I recommend Rosehips tea as a kidney and blood tonic. I also make up herbal extractions containing Bog Bean, Celery Seed, Dandelion Root, White Willow, Yarrow and homeopathic ingredients to help manage tension and pain. This sort of treatment will encourage the reversal of the rheumatic processes, reduce inflammation and pain and show up in a marked improvement in comfort and mobility.

In between these two extremes I have developed other treatment approaches which may be used alone or in combination with the above.

My major anti-inflammatory treatment which I call the Anti-Inflammatory Healer (or No-Bute) was developed to protect horses from the side effects of prolonged treatment with Phenyl Butazone. Bute is routinely prescribed as a maintenance treatment; it has no healing properties whatsoever, and may allow the horse to further aggravate an existing injury by masking the pain response while causing other problems such as gut ulceration and all the downstream problems resulting from this.

The herbs involved in this treatment include Devil's Claw, White Willow, Guaiacum, Burdock, Maritime Pine, Rosehips, Comfrey, Vinegar and Yarrow along with the appropriate homeopathic remedies.

Back to the Common Sense:

It is ridiculous to pretend that modern management and feeding of horses does not cause most of our problems in the first place.

Concrete stable floors (in fact restricting natural movement, exercise and stretching patterns by any sort of enclosure) is probably the primary reason for the structural fragility of the modern horse. This combined with the exposure to chemicals in feed, in the environment and in supplements and injectables further compromises the horse's health. If we then consider our destruction of natural herbage in the animals' pasture and the very limited and structured exercise patterns we often impose upon them, we can begin to appreciate the extent of the damage we are doing to these wonderful creatures.

In this context to say that Arthritis is sort of inevitable after an injury or a natural result of old age. Or, that Arthritis is a result of some sort of genetic weakness and can only be managed by painkillers is nonsense.

There is an awful lot we can do with the application of a little common sense and a few simple herbs.

Regards

Robert McDowell  
Herbalist