

Shockwave Therapy for Injury

Dave Kolb, DVM

It is the time of year when the clinic starts to see an increase in the number of tendon and ligament injuries due to horses fresh from the winter. The show season is getting heavy for many clients and their horse is unable to compete due to a tendon/ligament injury. What can be done to treat the tendon or ligament injury? One of the newest recommended treatments is Shockwave Therapy. This technology is based from a treatment used on humans that breaks up kidney stones. These high intensity ultrasound waves travel through fluid and soft tissue. When the injured tendon or ligament is hit with these waves, the tissue releases multiple healing factors to speed up the healing process. With this treatment the injury will heal twice as fast, compared to just rest. So, if a tendon is injured, the normal treatment is six to nine months of rest; shockwave treatment could potentially get your horse back to work in three months.



With all tendon or ligament injuries, it is good to follow the healing process with an ultrasound. Before work is started, an ultrasound should be done to make sure the area is completely healed. This will prevent re-injury to the same area.



The clinic purchased a shockwave unit last fall. We are seeing good success at treating tendon injuries with shockwave therapy. The success rate is higher if the shockwave treatment is started shortly after the injury has occurred. Shockwave treatment does give some immediate pain relief. During this time the horse's activity is highly restricted. A typical treatment plan using shockwave therapy is to start with an initial treatment, then in two weeks have a follow-up treatment. During this time the horse should be on stall rest with hand walking. It may be necessary to have one more treatment two weeks after the second treatment. This treatment plan varies with every case. It is also important not to let the horse have too much exercise within seven days after the treatments are done. A good rehabilitation schedule should be followed to obtain the best quality of healing. Shockwave therapy can also be used for a sore back, splints, joints, and non-healing wounds.