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HOOVES -- PUTTING THE HORSE'S BEST FOOT FORWARD

Hooves are made of a hard, crusty protein called keratin. You cannot add keratin by painting it on – it is produced by specialized cells within the hooves called keratinocytes, which rely on a nutrient-rich blood supply.

Key nutrients for hoof health include omega-3 fatty acids, quality protein, minerals (including copper, zinc, and silicon), beta carotene (which is used to make vitamin A), and the old standby – biotin (approximately 20 mg per day).

It's important to realize that hooves are low on your horse's list of priorities. Available nutrients will first be used for survival – feeding vital organs (heart, liver, kidneys, lungs, glands). If nutrients remain, they can be used to feed hoof tissue. Therefore, unhealthy hooves are an indication that there just aren't enough nutrients to go around. A forage-based diet, with proper vitamin/mineral supplementation to fill in nutritional gaps, will help ensure overall health, while protecting your horse's feet.

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