

## Bandages - Leg Wraps

Another necessary skill every horse owner should have is leg wrapping. Knowing how to properly wrap your horse's leg, whether for riding or other needs, can help with support, swelling, wound care, stabling needs, and shipping needs. However, this is a skill that is best to practice, practice, practice and to have a more experienced horse-person guide you through.

Improper wrapping can lead to further damage. Too loose, they can slip down causing the horse to trip or spook. Too tight, they can decrease or cut off circulation causing 'cording' or 'bandage bowing' - damage to a tendon on the back of the leg causing a "bowed tendon." All wraps and boots should be applied with the material wrapping in the direction toward the back or tail of the horse.

But we will cover some basic knowledge below regarding different types of leg wraps.

To correctly roll a wrap (especially brand-new bandages), start by taking the Velcro end and **place the closure on the inside** (so it's inside out). Roll the wraps snugly and evenly to make unrolling them against the legs easier and more uniform.

Before applying the wraps, your horse's legs should be clean and dry, he should be standing on level ground, and either tied safely or with someone holding him.

### Polo Wraps

Polo Wraps, also called training bandages, are used to support and protect the legs during exercises. Polos are typically made of a soft, stretchy material like fleece and have a Velcro fastener at one end. They are typically 5 inches wide and 9 feet long, and designed to be breathable and lightweight.

A correctly applied polo wrap should have evenly spaced overlaps and no wrinkles or bunching. Make sure all your wraps are rolled correctly (inside out) before you begin. Each polo should be rolled tightly and evenly before beginning - this makes it easier to unwrap on your horse's legs.

Your horse's legs should be clean and dry. Ensure your horse is standing on level ground and safely tied or held by someone. Always wrap adjacent legs to provide an even feel to your horse and consistent support

## Step-by-Step Guide to Polo Wraps

1. Place the end of the polo wrap right below the knee or about midway down the cannon bone. Your starting point may change depending on the length of your wraps and height of your horse's cannon bones.
2. Keep the rolled-up portion of the polo toward the back of your horse's leg and make sure the inside of the roll is facing you.
3. You should have just enough of the polo out in front of the leg so that when you wrap it around to the inside, it ends in the little groove behind the cannon bone and in front of the tendons. You can adjust the length if necessary.
4. Smoothly unroll the polo around the leg so that the first wrap covers the end.
5. Once the end is secured, you can let go of it and begin wrapping down the leg.
6. Try to maintain even tension on the polo as you wrap, neither tugging in places nor letting it go loose.
7. Never pull the wrap tight when on the inside of the leg as this could **damage the tendons** by pulling them forward. Only tighten when the wrap is positioned on the front of the leg, so it's pulling over the cannon bone toward the back.
8. Each turn should cover about 50% of the material from the last turn.
9. On the left legs, you'll wrap in a counterclockwise direction, but for the right legs you'll wrap clockwise.
10. Once you reach the bottom of the leg, make a slight "sling" under the fetlock, and then continue wrapping back up the leg. This will create a slight "V" shape in the front of the leg.
11. Continue wrapping back up the leg until you reach just below the knee where you started.
12. Fasten the Velcro securely.



Deciding whether to use a polo wrap, splint boots, sport medicine boots, or other leg bandages varies based on several factors, including:

- The horse's age, breed, and conformation
- His use, level of training and conditioning (fitness)
- The footing or terrain
- The rider's or handler's preferences and experience level
- Existing medical issues with the hooves or limbs

Both wraps and boots protect horses from interference-type injuries. For example, wrapping or using boots on a 3-year-old horse being started under saddle may be helpful in preventing a hind foot from overreaching and striking a front foot, or one leg hitting another as your young horse develops his balance.

Since it is possible to cause harm by improperly applying polo wraps, those with little experience or guidance may want to consider using an easy to attach **splint boot, open front boots or ankle boots** as protection for your horse when you're exercising him or he's turned out.

### Standing Wraps and Shipping Bandages

Standing wraps, also known as stable bandages, are used when the horse's movement is restricted, such as stall rest. Standing wraps are taller and longer than polos, about 6 inches wide and 12 feet long. They are less stretchy and made of thinner knit or polyester material. Quilts (also known as stable cotton) are often used under the standing wrap to provide an additional layer of padding for protection. Quilts are made of cotton and available in several heights (12, 14, or 16 inches) to best match your horse's front or hind legs. Measurements are generally taken just below your horse's knee or hock to the fetlock.

Shipping bandages are used during shipping and cover a larger area of the leg including the pasterns and heels.

**If you are unfamiliar with these wraps it is highly recommended you consult a professional trainer or veterinarian for wrapping.\*\***



## **Preparing Your Horse and the Wraps**

### **Wrapping Two to Four Legs**

A rule of thumb is that if you're going to wrap one front or hind leg (for example, to cover a wound), you should wrap the adjacent leg, too. Wrapping both front or back legs will provide equal support. This is especially important in the case of an injury where circulation might be compromised. Horses are also less likely to try to chew or kick a bandage off their legs if they all feel the same.

### **How to Correctly Apply a Standing Wrap**

All wraps are put on the legs with the material wrapping in the direction toward the back or tail of the horse. On the left legs, you'll wrap in a counterclockwise direction, but for the right legs you'll wrap clockwise.

1. First, you must put on the quilt. Although there's no Velcro on this padded layer, try to roll it inside-out before beginning.

2. Keep the rolled-up portion of the quilt toward the back of your horse's leg and make sure the inside of the roll is facing you.
3. You should have just enough bandage out in front of the leg so that when you wrap it around to the inside, it ends in the little groove behind the cannon bone and in front of the tendons. You can adjust the length if necessary.
4. Smoothly unroll the cotton around the leg so that the first wrap covers the end.
5. Once the end of the quilt is secured, you can let go of it and begin wrapping in even, level layers until the quilt is completely unrolled.



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6. Take the end of your standing bandage and place it about midway down the cannon bone. (Your starting point may change depending on the length of your wraps and height of your horse's cannon bones.) Tuck the end 1 or 2 inches inside the end of the quilt.
7. Again, keep the rolled-up portion of the standing wrap toward the back of your horse's leg and check that the inside of the roll is facing you.
8. Try to maintain even tension on the bandage as you smoothly unroll it around the leg and cover its end. Don't tug or let it go loose.
9. When you've secured the end of the standing wrap, let go of it and begin wrapping down the leg.
10. Never pull the wrap tight when on the inside of the leg as this could damage the tendons by pulling them forward. Only tighten when the wrap is positioned on the front of the leg, so it's pulling over the cannon bone toward the back.
11. Each turn should cover about 50% of the material from the last turn.

12. As you reach the fetlock area, leave about a half to 1 inch of cotton sticking out at the bottom and then continue spiraling back up the leg.

13. When you've reached the top of the leg, do the same by leaving a bit of quilt visible right below the knee or hock.

14. End by attaching the Velcro at the top or toward the middle of the cannon bone.

Keep in mind, there are lots of variations to wrapping, such as applying a shipping bandage over a bell boot, sweating a leg, or wet poulticing. A standing wrap can also be used to protect a wound that may have been treated with topical medication, a non-stick pad, and vet wrap or brown gauze as the first layer. Just remember to put a standing wrap on the other (non-injured leg), too.

### More Tips on Wrapping

- When applying shipping wraps, the bandages should be taller than your normal standing wraps. Shipping wraps should run from the normal height of right below the knee or hock and extend to just below the coronet band of the hoof. This is to protect that sensitive area and the heel bulbs during transport. Another option for transport is to use [shipping boots](#) which typically cover the knees, hocks, fetlocks, and coronary bands.



- Your wraps should lay flat without any lumps or folds of fabric. To prevent this and achieve a stovepipe finished look, use consistent pressure around the leg.
- Take the wraps off your horse every day to clean his legs, prevent skin irritation, check for signs of heat or swelling, and relieve any pressure points that may have formed.
- If wrapping over a wound, make sure you're first cleaning and protecting the area as your veterinarian has recommended before applying the quilt.
- It is best practice to have the same person wrap both legs so the amount of tension matches as closely as possible.
- For young horses or those unfamiliar with wearing wraps, try not to leave them unattended. Make sure your horse is comfortable wearing wraps before leaving him alone or loading him on the trailer.
- Wash your wraps and quilts after use to make sure they're sanitized and ready for the next time they're needed.

These are the basic instructions for applying standing wraps. Ask your veterinarian or trainer to teach you how to safely put on a variety of wraps. With practice you'll soon learn just where to start, the correct tension, and how much to overlap so that you end at the right spot every time.