

# Make-Do Bandages for Horses

by Heather Smith Thomas

Sometimes a horse is injured and needs immediate care while you're waiting for the vet to arrive—such as a pressure bandage to control excessive bleeding—or needs protection for a wound to keep out dirt and flies. Often you can improvise a satisfactory bandage from materials you might have on hand.

For an instant pressure bandage to halt the flow of blood from a spurting artery, for example, place clean towels or a folded shirt (several layers for thickness) over the wound and wrap it in place with a support bandage or leg wrap. It may take several layers of wrapping. For a leg wound, several thicknesses of clean towel directly over the wound, held in place with an ace bandage or leg wrap, will usually halt the bleeding.

If a major blood vessel has been cut, resulting in serious hemorrhage, a more effective pressure bandage can be created by placing something solid, such as a clean smooth rock or piece of wood, padded with bandaging material, against the wound. Secure it with several layers of wrap. Do not make the bandaging too tight or it will cut off circulation. Don't be alarmed if blood keeps seeping through the bandage for 10 minutes or so. Horses' blood clots slowly. As long as the main flow is slowed, the horse will be fine until the veterinarian arrives.

If the wound is on the body rather than a leg, in a place that's hard to bandage, put a clean towel over it and apply pressure with your hands until the vet arrives. If you need to secure the bandage to the horse's torso, fold a towel into layers and hold it in place with blanket straps, bungee straps or some other strapping long enough to go around the horse's body. A strap on each edge of the folded towels will hold them in place.

If air is going back and forth through an open wound on the abdomen, put a clean plastic garbage bag, folded to proper size, between the wound and the towel to halt airflow in and out. Do not leave the horse

unattended after applying this type of bandage or a pressure bandage. Monitor it continually to make sure it stays in place and remains tight enough to halt the bleeding—but not too tight if the injured area starts to swell.

Other make-do bandages can be created from a wide variety of things. Disposable diapers and sanitary napkins make good bandaging material to cushion and protect a vital structure or hold a dressing against a wound, or distribute the pressure of an outer elastic bandage more evenly. These items make excellent padding for a small wound, being absorbent and not sticking to the wound, and are also handy for making an emergency pressure bandage to halt bleeding.



A disposable diaper will wick moisture away from a wound; the outside plastic helps protect the wound and the self-sticking tabs can hold it on the horse's leg until you can cover it with an outer bandage/wrap. Disposable diapers are also

excellent bandage padding for the bottom of a hoof, being durable and waterproof. Adding duct tape around the outside edge at ground surface and over the bottom of the foot will give even more durability and keep the bandage pad from wearing through.

Old style cloth diapers make good padding and wraps, as do old sheets torn into strips and rolled up for later use as bandage-wrappings. Before you throw away old bedding or clothing, utilize the parts that would make padding or bandages; roll or fold them up to store with your first aid kit.

Bubble wrap (sheets of air-filled bubbles used for shipping fragile items) can make good temporary padding under a pressure bandage or support bandage, providing safe distribution of pressure against the horse. Bubble wrap can be applied to the lower leg for first-aid care of a bowed tendon, for instance. If used over an open wound, an absorbent layer such as a sanitary napkin should be applied next to the horse. The bubble wrap can be used temporarily until something better can be applied by your veterinarian. It should be changed within 3 to 6 hours, since the plastic holds heat and moisture against the horse's leg and may cause skin irritation.

Nylon stockings, pantyhose or tights can be used for holding a bandage in place, if there's no elastic bandage available. These can also make a good "mask" for covering facial wounds after they've been sutured or stapled by your vet. Just cut holes for the horse's ears and eyes.

To hold a bandage or poultice against the horse's withers, sew two pairs of pantyhose together at the waistband. This forms a large enough rectangular area to go over your bandage, leaving the stretchy legs available to tie together under the belly at the girth. Since this material stretches, it does not cut off circulation nor chaff.



Heather Smith Thomas has raised and trained horses for 50 years and has been writing about them nearly that long, selling more than 9000 stories and articles and publishing 20 books. Recent books include *Storey's Guide to Raising Horses*, *Storey's Guide to Training Horses*, *The Horse Conformation Handbook*, *Stable Smarts*, *Beyond the Flames—A Family Touched by Fire*, *Care and Management of Horses*, and *Understanding Equine Hoof Care*. She and her husband raise beef cattle and horses on their ranch near Salmon, Idaho.

You can see more of Thomas's work at her two blog sites, at [www.heathersmiththomas.blogspot.com](http://www.heathersmiththomas.blogspot.com) and <http://insidestorey.blogspot.com>. Two new blogs are posted every other week and the old ones are always there as well.