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### **Foal to Two Years: Safe and Sound**

So now that you have gotten your foal here safely it's time to prepare for the teenage years: those years between weaning and two. Much of the care your foals receive during this time will help them on their way to a happy, productive life.

The first step is to assess your foal's leg and foot conformation. The easiest way to determine if your foal's conformation is correct is to place imaginary or real dots down the front of the leg (the sticky dots at office supply stores work great) at the toe, coronary band, fetlock, top of cannon bone, knee, top of knee and top of forearm. These should form a straight line. If they do not, note the location of the dot where a change occurs. Many of these problems can be corrected with simple, regular foot trimming if identified early. Fetlock problems, in particular, have a very narrow time frame (when your foal is less than six weeks) for non-surgical correction. Other changes may self-correct over time.

Once you have checked alignment from the front it is time to assess the leg from the side. The angle of the hoof wall and pastern should be the same and the coronary band should be parallel or slightly angled down from toe to heel. It is also important to watch your foal walk straight towards you. You will be watching to make sure your foal's foot swings in a straight arc with no winging or paddling. Any concerns should be noted for discussion with your farrier.

We recommend your foal's first foot trim occur at one month of age. Trims on most foals only require a rasp and hoof pick because they have little to no sole or extra frog tissue.

Emphasis should be placed on creating a good quality foot and not on cosmetic appearance.

The next important step to lifelong health is proper nutrition. Many myths surround the feeding of foals and young horses. It was once thought that excessive protein would create problems with immature bones and cartilage. It is now known that genetics, excessive calories and strenuous exercise play the biggest role in developmental orthopedic disease (DOD).

Nutritionists currently recommend feeding a 14-18% protein feed at about 0.5-1.0% of body weight. Young horses should also be fed a diet with added calcium, phosphorus, copper and zinc to supply their maturing bone and cartilage with vital minerals. Most commercial diets designed for pregnant mares and foals meet this requirement but care should be taken to adjust based on forage choice. Alfalfa is higher in protein and calcium as opposed to coastal hay or grass. Youngsters should also have access to trace mineral salts and, of course, fresh clean water.

Exercise should include turnout for most of the day with minimal forced exercise such as lunging or ponying. Vaccinations and deworming schedules are often customized based on your situation. As a guideline, your foal should have its first set of vaccines by 4-5 months of age and be on a monthly rotational deworming schedule.

These are just a few guidelines to steer your foal through those tricky "teenage" years. Feel free to call us for help formulating a customized plan to help your foal grow up to be all they can be!!