

# Therapeutic Equipment

BY KAREN BRIGGS

**H**igher, faster, stronger. It's human nature to push our horses to the edge, whether it be in the jumping ring, reining pen, or on the racetrack. But when our willing equine partners exert themselves on our behalf, they can sometimes push tissues past their limits. And when microtraumas—tiny, almost imperceptible signs of stress to tissues, ranging from torn muscle fibers to microscopic bone fractures—begin to accumulate, they can leave horses lame and laid up. It's no wonder we're constantly looking for new ways to heal our horses faster.

Today we have a wide range of therapeutic gadgets. Some of these are only useful in the hands of a veterinarian; others can be safely applied by just about anyone.

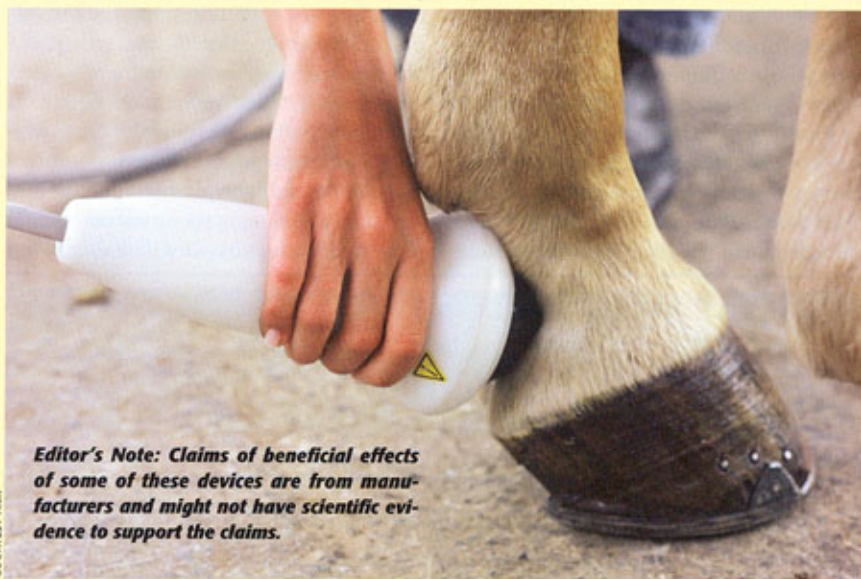
## Taking Water to the Next Level

Horse owners have long recognized hydrotherapy—applying water to the skin surface—as one of the most effective ways to deal with equine injuries. Cold water or ice applied to a fresh injury can help reduce swelling and heat, and it can provide temporary analgesia (thanks to its numbing effect) all at the same time. Hot water aimed at an older injury can stimulate blood circulation and encourage the body to deal with any lingering edema in the area.

One of the latest approaches is to combine cold therapy with compression. Two therapeutic systems, the Game Ready Equine unit ([www.gamereadyequine.com](http://www.gamereadyequine.com)) and the ThermoTek ProThermo ([www.prothermo.com](http://www.prothermo.com)) manage this. Both companies claim that their product produces a rapid reduction of soft tissue swelling on new injuries and faster recovery times for many types of leg injuries.

The Game Ready system has a variety of leg wraps to attach, via hoses, to a portable cooling unit filled with ice. The leg wrap delivers "dry cold" therapy (the skin is never directly exposed to water or ice) while simultaneously applying adjustable

*High-tech gadgets are one of the biggest trends in equine medicine, but they need an educated touch*



**Editor's Note: Claims of beneficial effects of some of these devices are from manufacturers and might not have scientific evidence to support the claims.**

**Extracorporeal shock wave therapy emit high-energy pressure surges of acoustic waves.**

cyclical air compression to the tissues.

The ProThermo device is similar, but it circulates a water-based fluid through the wraps that can be either cooled or warmed in a range from 3-41°C (37-105°F).

These next-generation devices offer considerable advantages over cold wraps alone. Cyclical compression mimics the muscle contractions that serve to help sweep excess edema out of an inflamed area and encourage blood flow, which carries nutrients and oxygen to injured tissues. Static compression can limit the amount of fluid that enters an injury site, but it does little to reduce existing swelling, and it can restrict fresh blood flow to the area.

Combined cold and compression can be a useful way to treat tendon and suspensory injuries, swelling due to bruises, bangs and contusions, and inflamed, arthritic joints.

It can also be used preventively, according to the manufacturers, by cooling the legs before and after intense workouts.

Units like these allow users to adjust temperature, pressure, and the length of each treatment, and they can even program and save treatment regimens.

There are few contraindications for this type of treatment. The manufacturers caution that horses with certain circulatory conditions or congestive heart failure should not receive compression therapy and that caution should be used with the wraps placed on areas that are not sensitive to pain (as with a nerved horse).

## Underwater Spa

Owners with large numbers of horses to keep fit and a significant financial commitment in doing so might also want to