

## What's the 'rap on liniments?

Liniments have a wide variety of applications. There are so many on the market and it is difficult to decide which one works the best for your needs.

Liniments are also called braces or come as gels or topical analgesics. Most liniments are oil based and need to be diluted with water before they can be applied to your horse. Mostly these are used as body braces. Because they are oil based your horse may be sensitive to some of the ingredients. Some horses are sensitive to the gels as well. The gels and oils can clog the hair follicles and when the horse sweats or the area is covered and cannot breathe a blister or irritation can occur.

If you are using an oils based or gel based liniment on their legs or back, **always** wash it off before putting on leg boots or saddle pads to prevent irritation and blistering when the horse sweats. Even liniments that are safe for use under wraps can cause irritation (with sensitive horses) if the horse sweats, because the pores can be blocked.

There are some liniments on the market that are water based or witch hazel based.

They are made as an infusion from herbs similar to the way a tea would be made. The ones that come to mind are Equinature's Leg Down Liniment and Body Brace and Equilite's Sore no More. They can both be applied as often as needed and once the area is dry it is pretty safe to cover it up with saddle pads or boots, even if the horse is going to sweat there should be no irritation. These liniments do not need to be diluted.

Be careful of liniments containing menthol. Menthol is oil that can cause irritation as well as liniments containing camphor, capsaicin, capsicum, or cayenne. While these are good topical analgesics they can cause irritation. If you are trying a new liniment always try it on a small spot overnight before you apply it to a larger area. Also some liniments will cause irritation after several applications in a row so be sure to watch the area carefully for dryness or flaking, loss of hair and swelling. If this occurs be sure to wash the area with a mild soap to remove the oils.

Most liniments are used for soreness and to improve tightness in the tissue reducing swelling and inflammation of sore muscles and tendons. But liniments can be used effectively in your daily grooming routine all year round. If your horse has a tendency to be sore in his muscles you can use liniments after you ride on a daily basis. In this case the liniments are best applied when the muscles are warmed up from riding. You can rub them into the muscles with the direction of the hair gently massaging it in. Another form of application is to add it to your cool down water some liniment like Bigel oil and Vetrolin are made for this purpose. If you are using water based liniments I prefer spraying it on after the horse has been sweat scraped or toweled and then letting their body air- dry. So most of it doesn't get lost when you scrape off the excess moisture. In the winter you can use a mixture of hot water and liniment to wipe down the sweaty areas on their chest and back and face a face cloth or sponge works well for this.

Liniments can also be used before hard workouts to help prepare the leg tissues for stress. I like to liniment and wrap my horse's legs the night before he jumps or does cross country or works on hard ground. And then I apply liniment under poultice after a hard work out. This really keeps the tendons firm.

You can also make your own specialized liniments by using dried herbs and the infusion method. Pick your herbs of choice depending on the properties of the plants you want and steep them like giant tea for a few hours or over night. Use approximately 1 cup of dried herbs per quart of water. After the infusion is cooled strain out the herbs (using a cheese cloth works best) and bottle the infusion. Store in the refrigerator and it should keep for about 7-10 days.

Some beneficial herbs to try are:

**Wormwood and Juniper Berries**, which are very helpful for, joint inflammation from arthritis and rheumatism

**Witch Hazel**, which acts as an astringent on the tissue

**Yarrow** which acts as an astringent, ant-inflammatory moves blood stagnation and is useful for sore muscles

**Peppermint** useful for sore muscles and also helps increase circulation to the area.

**Comfrey** is great for abrasions scratches and skin irritation but be careful on punctures as it can cause the wound to seal up.

**Calendula and Juniper** are both lymph stimulants

**Lavender, Arnica and Chamomile flowers** are great for muscle soreness and inflammation.

*Written by Christine Taylor*

*Owner of Body Kneads Muscle Therapy and author of Learn to stretch your Horse Videos, Manuals and workshops*

*Christine has been studying herbs and their uses for over 20 years and is the owner of EQUINATURE products a line of natural herbal body care products for your horse*

*You can contact her by email [bodykneads@charter.net](mailto:bodykneads@charter.net) or look at [www.Equinature.com](http://www.Equinature.com)*