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## The Equine Report

### To Supplement or Not To Supplement?

Most horse owners at one time or another have found themselves overwhelmed looking at the variety of supplements in horse magazines and local farm stores. Does my horse need a supplement? Which one should I choose if any? The answer is not simple.

All equine supplements are considered nutraceuticals, therefore they are not regulated by government agencies. The wide majority of them are untested and unproven and are commonly formulated with inferior ingredients and lack quality control. This makes it difficult to trust what the label claims. Try to choose supplements that are produced by well established, reputable companies and that have invested in scientific research. Talk to your veterinarian or equine nutritionist to find out more about which supplements are reliable and which one would be ideal for your horse.

There are two different ways to supplement: free choice or limit fed (top dress or vitamin/mineral grain). Free choice implies the horse will eat as much as s/he wants, it is always available. The most common form of free choice supplementation is salt blocks. The main problem with these is that horses only have an appetite for sodium to meet maintenance requirements and not for the other important trace minerals. Therefore, they are not likely to meet their nutritional requirements. Limit fed includes all the supplements that are used as top dressings supplied daily in a limited amount. These can be deficient as well since it can be difficult to fit all the nutrients in such a small amount. There are fortified grains formulated to be fed in small amounts (usually one pound) with the sole purpose to supply minerals and vitamins.

The main reason to supplement your horse's diet is to correct any nutrient deficiency created from feeding hay and/or grain. In the Northwest, we have some of the best quality hay available in

the USA and the world, which decreases the need to feed grain. The hay usually contains adequate protein and energy for the horse's needs, but as a general rule, it tends to be deficient in minerals like selenium, copper, zinc, calcium and phosphorus. This is most likely due to incomplete fertilization and soil pH conditions. There are many factors that will affect the quality of the hay. Try to avoid first cutting or late cutting hays that can affect maturity level and fiber contents. Also avoid feeding hay that has been stored over a year, as the quality diminishes and minerals can oxidize. It does not matter how good the hay *looks*, the only way to tell its nutritional content is to submit samples for analysis at a nutritional laboratory. Ideally you should consult your veterinarian or equine nutritionist to balance your horse's ration in order to meet his/her requirements.

A balanced vitamin mineral supplement, designed for our geographical area, will meet the maintenance requirements of most horses although not enough for pregnant mares, growing foals and high end performance horses. This scenario changes when fortified grains with vitamins and minerals are added to the mix because this can lead to over supplementation of one or more nutrients, such as: selenium, iodine, Vitamins A & D (fat soluble). These can be dangerous and toxic when fed in excess.

Some people supplement to achieve a higher competitive advantage, but this often leads to over-supplementation. Once the nutrient requirements are met, an excess in one or more minerals will not provide any additional competitive benefit. *More is not always better.* When selecting a supplement take into consideration the horse's age, performance level and metabolism as these will all affect his/her nutritional requirements.

Supplements are available in a wide variety of categories besides vitamin mineral supplements. Some of the most common ones include fat supplements (weight gainer), hoof supplements, electrolytes and probiotics to improve GI

health. Most of these are safe and unlikely to cause imbalances or over supplementation when fed according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

Joint health supplements consisting of Glucosamine, Chondroitin, hyaluronan products and/or MSM are marketed to improve cartilage and joint health helping with lameness and arthritis.

A newer wave of supplements includes antioxidants like Vitamins C and E, calming supplements like chamomile, insect control and herbal supplements among others.

As you might have noticed the answer is not simple. Try to choose supplements that are designed for our area and take into account the type of hay and grain being fed. Also try to keep your horse's feeding as simple as possible, the more different products added to the diet, the more likely to over-supplement on some nutrients. Remember that all equine supplements are considered nutraceuticals so they are not regulated by the government agencies. Bottom line, do your research. Evaluate ingredients and concentrate on products with some research to back up their claims. Talk to your veterinarian or equine nutritionist and consider what would be the best supplement for your horse's diet and his/her individual nutritional needs.



Mare Care Stallion Evaluation Lameness Surgery Advanced Dentistry

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**Eagle Fern Equine Hospital**  
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**Staff Continuing Education**

Dr. Shakyra Rosario attended the Northwest Equine Practitioners (NEPA) January Meeting on problems of the neonatal foal. In February, she attended a seminar sponsored by LMF Feeds on nutrition and Equine Metabolic Syndrome. And in March she spent three days in Corvallis at the Annual Oregon Veterinary Conference attending talks on topics like Equine Ophthalmology and Muscle Disorders.

Our vet tech, Carena Mondragon, recently attended continuing education on radiography. It was a great hands-on opportunity for learning how to get the best images possible.

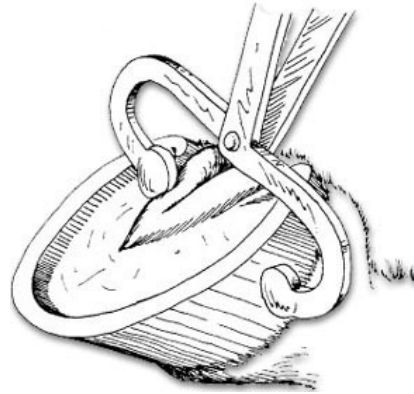
*Clinic Hours:*

*Monday-Friday 8:00 AM—6:00 PM*

*Saturday 8:00 AM—5:00 PM*

*24-hour emergency service 7 days a week.*

*After hours call (503) 721-4384*



Is your horse ready for spring and summer trail riding? Healthy hooves? Any unresolved lameness issues?

*Mention this newsletter for 10% off all lameness evaluations performed at the Clinic during the month of May 2010*

Evaluation includes: lameness exam, flexion tests, nerve blocks, radiography, ultrasound and joint therapy as needed.

**Equine Lameness Seminar**

**Saturday, May 22, 2010  
6:30 PM at the  
Equine Hospital**

**Presented by Dr. David Asmar  
First in a Series on Lameness  
“From the Ground Up”**

**Topics to be covered include :  
Laminitis/Founder  
Navicular Syndrome  
Abscesses**

*Please RSVP to (503) 630-4558  
Coffee and dessert will be served.*

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28255 SE Eagle Creek Road  
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