

## Is Your Horse off its Feed?

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**If your horse is off its feed, the first thing to do is to call your veterinarian.**

Although people can fast for weeks, horses cannot exist for long without food. A farm visit by your veterinarian may be necessary to determine the cause of your horse's disinterest in food.

Often, the cause behind a horse unwilling to eat is some kind of gastric distress. This can take many forms, including colic, strangles, internal parasites or ulcers. Some acute maladies may require surgery—time and professional veterinary advice is of the essence.

Other gastric problems may be addressed with non-testable, natural supplements. One such supplement is composed of oat products—particularly beta glucan and polar lipids.

Beta glucan is a carbohydrate that forms a hydrogel in the stomach, smoothing the passage of food through the system. It is also a strong immune stimulator, which arouses cells called macrophages. These specialized cells cruise the body, destroying bacteria that can harm the digestive tract.

Polar lipids, extracted from oats, can also coat the entire digestive tract, providing an extra layer of protection against bacterial infection. Polar lipids may improve the absorption of many nutrients, making it easier for a sick horse to absorb the nutrition it needs from its feed.

Refusal to eat may stem from ulcers that can be present in either the stomach or colon of the horse. One option to address these ulcers is a supplement containing glutamine, which provides energy directly to the cells lining the gastro-intestinal tract. Glutamine is called a "conditionally essential amino acid" because it is needed by the horse whenever the gut is damaged or stressed.

Another ingredient to look for in a supplement is threonine. This is an essential amino acid that is necessary for the production of mucus, which helps protect the gut against gastric acids and enzymes. When the intestinal tract is stressed, extra threonine may support the natural healing process.

Some extracts of yeast can also help fight harmful bacteria in the gut. These extracts are called mannan oligosaccharides (or MOS), and they work by expelling harmful bacteria and supporting the beneficial bacteria all horses need for a healthy gut.

A wounded digestive tract may benefit from supplementation with nucleotides, which are needed to grow new cells. Although a healthy horse can produce its own nucleotides, horses that are stressed may need them to help speed the healing process.

Administering a supplement to a horse that isn't eating can be a problem. A paste supplement with a pleasant oat flavor, given in a syringe, may help ease the delivery to a distressed horse. Given twice a day, a paste can start to coat the horse's stomach in hours, reaching the hindgut by the next day, which may help the horse begin to eat normally again. After that, maintenance with a top dress formula may be preferable.