

Why Does Your Horse Tie-Up?

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Many horse owners and trainers have experienced the frustration of having their horse tie up when exercising. In mild cases, the horse will stop and refuse to budge because its muscles are cramped. In more severe cases, the horse may not be able to stand up and can even suffer organ damage and death.



The exact mechanism of tying up is still being researched, but scientists know it involves a build up of lactic acid in the muscles. Some horses may be genetically predisposed to suffer from lactic acid buildup, but there may be another contributing factor: the diet you feed your horse.

The standard regimen for a performance horse involves high-energy feeds that are selected to give the horse maximum energy. But those feeds may also cause problems in the hindgut, including colonic ulceration.

In particular, high energy feeds can lead to an overabundance of lactic-acid producing bacteria. With excess amounts of lactic acid in the hindgut as a result, a chemical imbalance is created. The acid is absorbed from the hindgut into the blood, which quickly becomes overloaded. With nowhere else to go, the extra lactic acid is dumped into the muscles, where it creates the potential for tying up.

What can you do? The balance of bacteria in the hindgut is delicate. The kinds of feed required by performance horses may tip it too far toward acid-production, causing the problems described above. One simple solution may be to use a supplement that helps to support the proper ratio of bacteria in the gut.

Sometimes called a pre-biotic, such a supplement could help to maintain the growth of beneficial bacteria while simultaneously stunting the growth of harmful, acid-producing bacteria.

For example, a complex sugar derived from yeast binds to harmful bacteria and prevents them from attacking the gut. This substance also feeds beneficial bacteria, providing a double dose of help.

The addition of oil to a horse's diet may also help reduce the incidence of tying up. Oat oil contains vitamin E and compounds called polar lipids that are known to coat the gut and help to block bacterial attacks.

Another helpful product is called beta glucan. This substance can be derived from oats and creates a kind of gel that absorbs sugars and releases them slowly. That helps to stop the sugar rushes that can make a horse jumpy and can disrupt the bacterial balance in the gut.

Finally, glutamine in the diet helps to modify the chemistry of muscles, allowing them to clear lactic acid more efficiently.

By adding the non-testable, natural substances listed above, you may help your horse experience fewer episodes of tying up. Used as part of a daily maintenance program, such supplements may assist horses by supporting optimal health for the entire digestive tract.