

## Why Is Your Horse So Temperamental?

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**The answer to why** some horses are flighty one moment and lethargic or stubborn the next may involve more than a simple nod to the characteristics of the average high-performance horse. In fact, the true culprit in this all-too-common temperamental behavior may instead be the performance horse diet.

Race, show and sport horses are typically fed a high-energy diet that is vastly different from the high-fiber, low-carbohydrate meals horses consume throughout the day in the wild.

Intermittent feedings of high-energy grains, often with added fat or carbohydrates and laced with molasses, can trigger a sugar rush in the horse. Like an ice cream-fueled child running amok at a birthday party, horses on this sugar high may have difficulty focusing on your training efforts and can become almost impossible to work with.

Both horse and human bodies respond to excess sugar the same way: they produce a burst of insulin to process the sugar. But when sugar levels are out of the normal range (as may occur after a high-energy meal), insulin production goes into overdrive. In time, that excess amount of insulin produces a sugar low, causing the horse to swing from excitability to lethargy.

**What can be done?** Pasture feeding—the closest environment to what a horse would experience in the natural state—is one possibility to address this problem. For a performance horse, however, this is entirely impractical.

Another option includes the administration of daily doses of beta glucan—a dietary fiber found in oats. Beta glucan forms a gel that holds onto sugars, releasing them slowly as feed travels through the digestive system. This allows for a slower release of sugar, helping to reduce highs and lows. Beta glucan provides a viable option for performance horses that need to be maintained on a high energy diet while still focusing on the rigors of their training regimens

Unfortunately, oats are not highly digestible, so increasing oat intake will not generally allow horses to realize the full potential benefits of beta glucan. The substance can, however, be found in commercially available, non-testable supplements.