

## Does Your Horse Have Ulcers?

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**If you have a performance horse, the odds are that it has an ulcer.** The stresses of competition, such as stalling, heavy exercise and intermittent feeding, can take a heavy toll on equine health. In fact, a number of studies have now shown that over 60% of show horses have stomach ("gastric") ulcers—while more than 90% of race horses may be affected. Even more surprising is the number of performance horses suffering ulcers in the colon ("colonic" ulceration). Research puts the number of performance horses affected at 63%.

Horses with ulcers suffer pain and discomfort just like their human counterparts. Signs of ulceration include rolling, abdominal sensitivity, irritability and even anemia. And these symptoms can lead to performance problems. Worse yet, they can lead to colic, which is the number one killer of horses.

Conclusively diagnosing equine ulcers isn't a simple matter. A veterinarian can use an endoscope to view ulcers in the stomach, but ulcers in the colon can't be viewed this way. However, a new diagnostic tool, the SUCCEED® Equine Fecal Blood Test, can help veterinarians detect excessive bleeding from the foregut or the hindgut of the horse, as an indication of gastric or colonic ulceration.

### What can be done?

There are several prescription and over-the-counter drugs on the market that can heal a gastric ulcer in days. Some of these products, however, cannot be used prior to events because they are "testable substances". In addition, many of these drugs work by lowering stomach acidity, which may allow excess starch to reach the hindgut. This can promote the proliferation of harmful bacteria in the colon, and allow ulcers to form there, rather than in the stomach.

An alternative approach to ulcer treatment involves the use of non-testable, natural foodstuffs to heal the intestinal tract and support good health throughout this critical system. Here's a quick rundown of how some substances work to keep your horse's gut healthy:

- **Beta glucan** is a dietary fiber found in oats and barley that has been shown

to slow down the movement of feed through the gut, allowing excess starches to be digested before they hit the colon. Beta glucan is also a powerful immune stimulant, encouraging the horse's immune system to mount a defense against any bacteria that might try to invade an ulcer.

- **Polar lipids** are found in specially-processed oat oil. Lipids (or fats) help to protect the lining of the gut. Polar lipids are emulsifiers – they help water and oil to mix, and therefore allow certain oil-soluble vitamins, such as A, D, E and K, to be absorbed by the gut.
- **Glutamine** is a natural amino acid that may help the gut renew and heal itself. Glutamine assists the cells of the gut to grow close together, keeping out dangerous micro-organisms.
- **Threonine** is another amino acid. It's essential for the creation of mucus, which lines the stomach and intestines, protecting them from acidic digestive juices.
- **Yeast sugars** called mannan oligosaccharides (or MOS, for short) help the immune system to get rid of bad bacteria. MOS also absorbs dangerous toxins so they can be safely excreted.

Each of these natural substances has its own role to play in equine digestion. Used together, as part of an overall preventive health care program, they can help support optimal digestive health for the performance horse.