

Winter 2010



The George Veterinary Group & Belmont House Equine Clinic

USING SUPPLEMENTS - WHAT'S THE VALUE?

I know how tempting it is to think the answer to improved health and performance may lie in the contents of a tub but it is important to evaluate critically anything you feed to your horse - or yourself for that matter!

If we are honest with ourselves, we are more likely to make good decisions. If looking at supplements remember the golden rule of "first do no harm". Then ask yourself what it is that is concerning you about your horse for you to be considering a supplement.

There is a distinct difference between a horse that has developed a medical problem and a horse needing a specific supplement relating to a defined set of circumstances. The market for supplements is huge and the marketing of them is very slick! So how do you tell whether a supplement is appropriate and check its quality?

Sadly there is no simple answer to this one! Testing of some equine supplements has pro-

duced some worrying results in terms of the contents of the pot not containing quite what was expected!

If a product is not produced in the UK it may not even come under trading standards regulations in terms of requirement to meet a label claim. Also some supplements are produced to the level of a feed where batches can vary in their exact make up whilst other supplements are produced to medicine grade and thus each batch is consistent in composition and the contents of the pot meet label claim.

Be realistic when purchasing. If a product seems too good to be true then it probably is, likewise with the price! Also remember a supplement may not be what is needed. Management changes or dietary changes may actually completely solve the problem you were considering a supplement for.



Examples of this include some respiratory diseases or care of horses with azoturia, both conditions we see more over the winter months.

So before you reach for the supplement take a step back and look at the circumstances surrounding your horse.

SOME SUPPLEMENTS WE RECOMMEND AND WHY....

This is not an exhaustive list nor an exclusive one! There are other products as well and results vary between individuals.

There are specific supplements appropriate in the treatment and management of diagnosed medical conditions but here I have looked at some common supplements that are widely used to benefit different parts of the body.

MUSCLES

Myoplast is a mix of essential amino acids required for the development of lean muscle tissue.

It is of benefit when a horse is in work to help build lean muscle mass with exercise. It usually needs to be fed for about six weeks and then once the muscle mass is developed, it should remain provided the horse remains in a suitable work programme.

Some horses are on it for longer and there is no problem with doing this if you wish.

It is appropriate for helping fitten working horses especially prior to competition, bringing horses back into work after a period of box rest or to help older horses that are losing muscle mass.



JOINTS

There are a huge number of supplements on the market all aiming to reduce the effects of joint wear and tear.

Be realistic about what a supplement can be expected to do. They cannot repair articular cartilage that is worn or torn and there has recently been publicity about the lack of efficacy of glucosamine in humans.

There has been some attempt to evaluate the effect of chondroitin and glucosamine supplementation in horses in a scientific way, but much of the information on all joint supplements including

oral hyaluronic acid and green lipped muscles extract remains anecdotal.

We have looked at the market and, in terms of quality ingredients, reliability of manufacture and technical information to support efficacy, we use "Synequin" and have done for a number of years now with much positive feedback from horse owners.



LUNGS

Winter is a time where we see increased incidence of coughing due to dust exposure with increased time spent stabled and the feeding of hay.

Management changes, soaking hay or feeding haylage and improved ventilation are key to solving this problem.

Long term supplementation should not

be necessary but in some mild cases after a flare up when conditions may have been difficult e.g. during a freeze, "Respimin" can be useful.

Spending your money on improving stable ventilation and hygiene rather than of supplements is probably good advice!

"before you reach for the supplement take a look at the circumstance surrounding your horse"

VITAMINS & MINERALS

The requirement for these as a supplement will depend on the particular hard feed your horse is receiving, his age and workload.

There are numerous vitamin and mineral supplements on the market and as ever the contents and quality does vary. If considering using one, take advice on what may be suitable in your indi-

vidual case either from us or from an equine nutritionist.

We do use "Mega-base" from the Equistro range as one good quality vitamin and mineral supplement.



STOMACH

Pro-biotics can be useful to aid gut function and digestion especially in horses that are travelling or experiencing any sort of dietary change.

There are so many different ones on the market, lots of which contains the necessary ingredients in the right concentrations. Do phone and ask if you are unsure.

Gastric ulcers are another stomach problem for which many supplements are sold. Ensure first that ulcers really are a problem for your horse rather than just supplementing in case.

Make the necessary dietary and management changes if they are and treat them as necessary. One supplement that does have some proven benefit in horses prone to gastric ulcers is "Pronutrin" and may be worth considering.

HOOVES

Another area where there are a myriad of supplements available is for feet. Again looking at the whole diet is advisable before rushing in with a supplement. Also ensuring that farriery is kept well up to date is important.

"Kerabol" again from the Equistro range, may be an appropriate hoof supplement.



WINTER WORMING

Remember to ensure your horse has received a larvicidal worming dose this winter. Also consider tapeworm treatment as well. For those of you using our targeted worming programme, this is the time of year to treat with "Equest Pramox" in most cases. Do ring for individual advice about worm control for your horses.