

Supplement Use Is A Delicate Balance

By Amy Seigel, Contributing Editor

One of the best ways to maintain the long-term health of any horse (or human, for that matter) is through proper nutrition. Most horses have little trouble getting their daily dose of vitamins and minerals from a balanced diet of forage and fortified grain. As a result, extreme vitamin deficiencies are quite rare in horses. Since not every equine diet provides optimum levels of essential vitamins and minerals, however, a horse can be getting just enough of what he needs to stay relatively healthy—but not enough for maximum wellbeing. Especially if your customers have horses that fall into any of the following categories, adding a vitamin and/or mineral supplement to their feeding regimen is a great first step towards ensuring their

animals' optimal health:

- Horses on calorie-restricted diets or “hard keepers”
 - Horses without access to high quality forage, those who are eating hay that is more than a year old (vitamins break down over time in stored feed), or when there are low levels of minerals such as iodine, selenium or copper in the soil
 - Growing youngsters, and broodmares in gestation or lactation
 - Horses in high-stress situations, such as frequent traveling, showing, or racing
 - Horses recovering from an illness or infection
 - Horses with bone/soft tissue injuries or certain metabolic disorders
- As beneficial as these supplements can be, however, it's important that your

customers understand this is one situation where the “if some is good, more is better” way of thinking can quickly get you into trouble. While vitamin deficiencies can have devastating health effects, overdoses—which are a real possibility with some (but not all) vitamins and minerals—are equally dangerous.

Finally, since hay grown in different geographic areas can have vastly different nutritional compositions, the best way to determine exactly what your horse is eating—and what essential elements might be missing—is to send a hay sample off to a county or state agricultural office for nutritional analysis. For help locating a lab in your area, contact The National Forage Testing Association on the web at <http://foragetesting.org>.

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