

Nutrition and Hoof Conditions in Horses

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Many horses cannot perform to their potential because they have hoof problems that keep them out of work or reduce performance. The first thing to consider when evaluating a feeding program to address a case of bad feet is total feed (energy) intake. Ensuring that energy requirements are being met is the most important step in hoof growth and integrity. Many race horses and lactating mares experience a negative energy balance for prolonged periods and this can lead to hoof problems. Secondly, as the hoof wall is mostly comprised of protein, it is important to ensure that the horse is receiving an adequate intake of good quality protein. Minerals are also important for hoof growth and if a deficiency is compromising the horses' health then the health of the hoof will deteriorate as well. Adequate zinc levels are extremely important when it comes to the integrity of skin, coat and hooves.

When it comes to hoof care, repair and maintenance the key ingredient that comes to mind is Biotin. Biotin supplementation is widely used in the horse industry by trainers, veterinarians & farriers and it is becoming increasingly popular for use in other species too. Biotin is an essential B vitamin and a deficiency in horses will usually appear in a dull, lacklustre coat and/or dull, cracked brittle hooves. Horses with a susceptibility to this deficiency will show a marked improvement with supplementation. It is important to remember that it will take a period of several months to totally improve bad hooves but a measurable improvement in a shinier coat should be apparent in as little as five weeks.

Horses naturally get Biotin from grazing good quality pastures. Other natural sources of this useful vitamin come from barley, oats and soybean meal. Biotin is water-soluble and consequently is not stored by the horse for very long. Any of the vitamin not used by the body cells will be excreted in the urine. Therefore, if you have a horse with poor hoof condition a biotin supplement should be added to their feed on a daily basis. When choosing a hoof supplement avoid those that only contain Biotin as there are a number of other ingredients that are important for hoof and coat condition such as Zinc, Calcium, Vitamin A and Copper.

Although most hoof problems are a result of genetic predispositions and bad mechanics, it is possible through correct nutrition and supplementation to improve the overall health of the hoof. Hyfeed Equimin Plus is a powerful supplement containing a comprehensive range of vitamins and minerals to improve hoof, coat and skin conditions and can be used to aid in the recovery of Laminitis