

Supplements For Horses

Supplements for horses can be divided into a variety of categories. Remember there is little or no research to support the use of many herbal or supplemental ingredients for specific purposes in horses. Here's a sampling of product types and what they might contain:

Joint health Generally these products contain glucosamine, chondroitin, hyaluronate, and/or methylsulfonylmethane (MSM), all purported to have chondroprotective (retarding degeneration of articular cartilage and promoting cartilage cell metabolism) properties.

Respiratory health These products are designed to help dilate bronchial passages and ease breathing for horses with allergies, small airway disease, or heaves. Garlic, ginger, elecampane, licorice root, and marshmallow (the herb) are some likely ingredients.

Anti-inflammatory and pain relief These supplements might contain herbal pain relief substitutes such as yucca, devil's claw, willow bark, or recent discoveries such as ASU (avocado and soybean unsaponifiables), which research has shown reduces the severity of cartilage breakdown and joint membrane bleeding.

Antioxidant Ingredients such as vitamin C, vitamin E, selenium, and grape seed extract might help protect cells from free radical damage.

Calming Supplements containing valerian, chamomile, vitamin B1, L-tryptophan, and/or magnesium are used. For the hormonal swings of mares, they might contain herbs such as raspberry leaf or black cohosh.

GI tract health These are designed to ease clinical signs of gastric and/or intestinal ulcers (papaya is one popular ingredient). Prebiotics are said to aid beneficial bacteria populations in the gut, and probiotics are live cultures designed to bolster the existing populations of beneficial gut bugs. (See page 43 for more information on prebiotics/probiotics.)

Electrolytes These are designed to help replace microminerals lost in sweat, usually sodium, chloride, potassium, calcium, and magnesium.

Immune system health These are intended to support healthy

immune system function and might contain antioxidants and/or herbal preparations such as garlic and echinacea.

Energy boosters Crafted to support the efforts of performance horses, these might contain iron, vitamin B12, DMG (dimethylglycine), which could enhance muscle metabolism, and HMB (beta-hydroxy beta-methylbutyrate), which might increase lean muscle mass.

Hoof growth and health These contain ingredients such as biotin (a B vitamin), methionine, and zinc to help grow stronger hoof horn.

Insect control Feed-through fly control products might contain organophosphates or insect growth regulator compounds that inhibit the formation of chitin (which makes up the hard outer covering in adult insects). Both pass through the horse and do their work in the manure pile.

Metabolic issues Designed to address insulin resistance, chronic laminitis, and equine Cushing's syndrome, these products might contain magnesium, chromium, ginseng, banaba leaf, and cinnamon.

Muscle health These contain ingredients such as creatine, DMG, and gamma oryzanol (a substance found in rice bran that might help build muscle mass) and are designed to assist in muscle development.

Vitamins and minerals Some of these supplements are broad-spectrum; others are targeted to address specific concerns and contain only specific vitamins or minerals.

Senior supplements These products might address arthritic joints, decreased digestive efficiency, and tissue damage, with a variety of ingredients ranging from MSM to antioxidants to prebiotics and probiotics.

Skin and coat Products with a high fat content contribute to supple skin and a glossy hair coat. Flaxseed and other sources of omega-3 fatty acids are particularly popular. Some products might contain ingredients such as paprika to help enhance certain coat colors.

Tendon and ligament health Silica is a possible aid in keeping tendons and ligaments elastic and resilient.—Karen Briggs