WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY HORSE?

You will be amazed at how many issues are diet related. Whilst 'diet' encompasses everything your horse consumes; the problems often originate from the pasture grass. Hence, the term 'Grass Affected'.

Many people are not aware that some of the grass growing in your horse's paddock is not actually good for them. Although most grasses are generally considered safe for horses, they can have side effects that can affect the health and behaviour of your horse.

Below are some of the many symptoms your horse may show when eating un-safe horse pasture or when grazing 'safe' grass under certain conditions such as after drought breaking rain, or short, green shoots or overgrazed pasture, etc:

The classic outline of a "grass affected" horse

Behavioural problems

- Spooky or Anxious
- Dislike's handling (ears, sides, and chest)
- Resentful to do up-transitions – tail swishing, ears back on pushing forward
- Spaced-out look / eyes glazed over
- Over-sensitive
- Does not like being touched
- Herd bound – hates being left alone
- Bolting off in short bursts
- Violent shying
- Bucking
- Aggressive behaviour
- Fence walking
- Excessive snorting
- Over-heats when rugged
- Sweating with little exercise
- Raging seasons (mares)
- Staring at nothing
- Compulsive eating – cannot keep head up from eating
- Grinding teeth
- Girthiness

Physical Symptoms

- Muscle tightness & stiff gait
- Tripping or stumbling often
- Head flicking
- Short stepping (skips in canter)
- Enlarged joints
- Joint or bone tenderness
- Stands wide base
- Unexplained lameness
- Sore back / saddle fit issues
- Bone splints
- Ruptured or contracted tendons
- Spontaneous fractures
- Hormonal imbalances (mares)
- Swollen facial bones
- Loose teeth
- Nasal obstruction
- Staggers
- Loose droppings
- Cracked or flaky hooves
- Lacking energy
- Prone to mud fever or sunburn

Magnesium deficiency

The following symptoms may be associated with lack of magnesium:

- Badly behaved, bucking
- Very scatty, spooky, and anxious
- Over sensitive, unsafe, cannot handle pressure of competition
- Imbalance
- Bolting off in short bursts
- Grinds Teeth
- Tight and Tense
- Claustrophobia & Unpredictable
- Sore Back, Cold Backed, Muscle Tightness
- Cannot get a saddle to fit or discomfort with the saddle
- Weak Hind Quarters, appears lame behind
- Head flicking
- Short stepping, Skips in Canter with hind legs
- Herd bound (goes ballistic if paddock mate leaves)

RECOMMENDED

Alleviate GOLD or SOS
Plus
CalmHealthyHorses Plan

High Potassium levels

All short rapidly growing grass in spring and early autumn has the potential to be high in potassium at the same time low in sodium.

The following symptoms may be associated with high potassium levels:

- Stiff movement
- Tense, hard muscles
- Twitching around flanks and ribcage
- Tendency to run off
- Back legs together when cantering

RECOMMENDED

Alleviate GOLD
Plus
GrazeEzy
Supreme MVA
Salt
CalmHealthyHorses Plan

Potassium rich foods

- Lucerne
- Kikuyu also gets exceptionally high in potassium and nitrates, and exceptionally low in sodium which can cause kikuyu 'poisoning' particularly in autumn or after a drought breaking rain
- Rye (is also a nitrate accumulator)
- Clover
- Kelp / seaweed *
- Molasses *
- Cider vinegar *
- Soya bean Meal *
- Ginseng, dandelion, nettle, sage, yarrow, rosehips, slippery elm, garlic, plantain
- Echinacea, chamomile, comfrey, chicory *

*Whilst many of these herbs and feeds can have great health benefits, they need to be considered when arriving at the sum-total potassium content of your horse's diet.

Mycotoxins

There are hundreds of different fungi living in and around the general soil environment, more so in moist, humid climates. Some are beneficial but many produce harmful mycotoxins. The more acidic the soil environment the more pathogenic fungi abound.

Sometimes you see rust mould on crops or grasses, sometimes you see a black mould on grass seed-heads. Topping the grass and leaving it to decay in the paddock creates an ideal environment for fungi too. Symptoms of mycotoxins may appear like magnesium deficiency.

Grasses that may harbour fungi which produce myco-toxins

- Rye Grass (Perennial)
- Tall Fescue
- Paspalum
- Phalaris (Reed Canary Grass)
- Bermuda Grass (couch)
- Clover
- Kikuyu

RECOMMENDED

ToxDefy

EMS Equine Metabolic Syndrome

Horses with Metabolic Syndrome are prone to laminitis. Both are caused by a disturbance to electrolyte homeostasis (the body's ability to keep correct levels) which in turn affects the ability to regulate blood sugar levels. Ensuring there is no such disturbance reduces the likelihood of becoming metabolic and therefore reduces the risk of developing laminitis.

Symptoms associated with metabolic syndrome

- Sore feet
- Cresty neck and fat pads
- Puffiness around eyes and sheath
- Unusual swellings on cheeks, down shoulders, and ventral abdomen

RECOMMENDED

Alleviate GOLD or SOS
Plus
Supreme MVA
GrazeEzy
Salt
CalmHealthyHorses Plan

If the horse or pony already has sore feet:

- Immediately remove from all green grass, no lucerne or clover (due to their potassium/nitrate content)
- Dissolve a tablespoon each of SOS or GrazeEzy in water and gently syringe into side of mouth every few hours for a few days or until improvement then continue to dose as directed on label.

Increased Excitability

- Over-reactive
- Spooky
- Twitchy when touched
- Does not like being brushed
- Muscle sore
- Saddle-fitting problems
- Sacro-iliac problems e.g., 'tight behind', 'bunny-hopping' swapping leads
- Tail clamping, excessive tail swishing, even bolting off
- Wanting to hollow out, throw head in the air
- Touchy around the ears
- Head-flicking/shaking

RECOMMENDED

GrazeEzy
Plus
Alleviate GOLD
Salt
CalmHealthyHorses Plan

Sodium deficiency

Signs of low sodium may include:

- Stumbles over nothing
- Ill-thrift, no top-line, cannot seem to put on weight
- Dull, lethargic, sleepy-eyed look
- The horse has 'No Go', stops for no apparent reason
- Seems 'nappy'
- Has started to refuse jumps
- Fence chewing (wood), trees or licking you, the dirt or eating manure
- Suffers from periodic abdominal cramps especially with a change temperature and moisture levels in the grass
- Exhibits abnormal sweating: either not enough or sweats too easily with little exertion
- Shows signs of demineralisation
- Stiff, tight especially in the hindquarters, 'Twitchy'
- Cannot tolerate grains

Recommended dose is one tablespoon/day for large ponies and small horses, 2 tablespoons/day for larger horses. Approx. 10g/100kg BW daily (preferably split between am and pm feeds).

Also, consider the salt content of hard feeds. (If your horse passes a little liquid after manure – reduce salt intake)

RECOMMENDED

Add Plain Salt or Himalayan Salt
(Not Iodized)

Oxalate Grasses

Grasses associated with calcium and phosphorus deficiencies, osteoporosis, osteodystrophia fibrosa (ODF), nutritional secondary hyperparathyroidism (NSH) and 'bighead'
Grasses with an oxalate content greater than 0.5% are hazardous to your horse's health without correct supplementation. The grasses below marked * are all oxalate grasses.

'Bighead' is the end-stage of NSH and does not occur in all horses. Symptoms of calcium and phosphorus deficiencies include:

- The first symptom is usually lameness, an insidious shifting lameness, general tenderness of the joints & a stiff, stilted gait.
- Ill thrift, weight loss & a rough coat may occur, some horses prefer to lie down
- Some horses have muscular weakness & prefer to canter rather than trot
- Spontaneous avulsion of ligaments & spontaneous fractures can occur
- Pica (dirt eating), chewing problems (due to loosening of the teeth) can occur

Current recommendations to prevent bone loss from horses grazing oxalate grasses consists of feeding large amounts of limestone (in-organic calcium) and or DCP (Phosphorous). This approach is cheap but inefficient and is way out-of-date.

Simply raising calcium intake while ignoring its complex interaction with other vitamins and minerals will have little or no health-enhancing effect. Worse, it may lead to serious health issues:

- Depositing of excess calcium in body tissues
- Build-up of arterial plaque (hardening of the arteries)
- Kidney & other 'stones', crystals in the eye
- Appearance of various bony calcifications

It is important to supplement with an organic, chelated calcium along with magnesium, phosphorous, boron and Vitamin D all of which are required to ensure that available calcium makes it to the bones.

Signs that demineralisation is in progress

- Lameness, shifting, hard to pinpoint
- A shortened gait, with stiffness
- Loss of condition
- Bone and joint tenderness.
- Fractures: weak bones fracture easily
- A swollen face and/or jawbone (Big Head).

RECOMMENDED

XtraCal + Supreme MVA
or
Bone Formula Forte

Reversing 'Big Head'

By the time Big Head is evident, the process of demineralisation is well advanced. The skull isn't the only part of the skeleton that is affected. This disease can be likened to severe osteoporosis where so much calcium has been withdrawn from the skeleton that it has been replaced by soft connective tissue. This process can creep up over years or where the horse has been grazing high oxalate grass such as Setaria without effective supplementation, it can be evident in less than 2 months.

Success in reversing 'Big Head' depends on the severity of each case and involves correcting the diet.

Horse-friendly Grasses

Safer horse grasses

- *Rhodes grass*
- *Creeping bluegrass*
- *French millet*
- *Brown-top*
- *Cocksfoot*
- *Yorkshire Fog*
- *Crested dog's Tail*
- *Prairie grass*
- *Grazing brome*
- *Timothy*

Grasses best avoided

- *Rye grass*
- *Clover*
- *Paspalum*
- *Couch grass*
- *Phalaris (blue canary grass)*
- *Cats ear (often confused with dandelion)*
- *Kikuyu **
- *Setaria **
- *Buffel **
- *Green panic*
- *Pangola (Digitaria) **
- *Para grass **
- *Guinea grass **
- *Signal grass **
- *Purple pigeon grass*

Calm Healthy Horses Step by Step Guide

Introduce any new feeds or supplements slowly, over a period of one to two weeks. This allows time for the digestive flora resident in the hindgut to adjust.

If you need to change your horse from an 'all green grass' to an 'all hay' diet, introduce hay for a week before removing the horse completely from the grass. Similarly, when introducing grass back into your horse's diet again, make sure this is done gradually over several weeks, starting with 10-15 minutes.

The best way to balance your horse's diet is to remove the items that unbalance it.
This is the principle behind the CalmHealthyHorses Plan which lowers the potassium content of the diet by replacing green, growing grass, lucerne, clover, kelp, protein meals and herbs with high fibre plain feeds.

*Steps 1- 3 apply to all horses all year round. Steps 4-7 allow you to adjust your horse's diet according to weather, season, grass types, or health and behaviour issues.

1. Correctly feed the flora in the hindgut with plenty of fibre (mature grass, hay, chaffs and unsweetened beet). This is crucial because it is the flora in the hindgut that feeds the horse.

2. Take care of your horse's vitamin and mineral requirements with Supreme Australian-Horse Vit & Min. Horses in the wild get to browse on a variety of deep-rooted plants and bushes which bring up minerals, whereas our confined domestic horses tend to be minerally deprived.

Calm Healthy Horses Step by Step Guide continued

3. Add plain salt to the daily feed.

4. If required add GrazeEzy and SOS to your horse's feed when he is out on pasture especially if you have noticed symptoms of 'increased excitability'. GrazeEzy and SOS together help buffer your horse's system to neutralise the effects of growing grass. Alleviate GOLD can also be added for particularly challenging cases. Alleviate GOLD works by improving the function of every cell in the body making horses perform at their respective functions optimally.

5. ToxDefy improves your horse's feed quality by binding myco-toxins all year round. This is especially important in tropical regions or times of warm, humid weather when fungi proliferate (spring & autumn). This mycotoxin binder does not affect levels of other essential nutrients.

6. Keep some Alleviate on hand. The small daily dose is unrivalled for relieving anxiety. It promotes ease of handling and can be doubled or trebled in times of stress such as the night before & morning of events, competitions, trail tides, race-day. It can be dissolved in water and syringed in if required.

7. XtraCal contains chelated calcium as well as chelated magnesium, phosphorous, boron and Vitamin D. Chelated calcium, being already attached to an amino acid, cannot be stolen by the oxalate molecules so are available to the horse. Feed Xtra-Cal when additional calcium is required for:

- Pregnant & lactating mares and young, growing horses
- Horses showing signs of calcium deficiency
- Horses grazing oxalate grasses

8. Adjust your Pasture Management – **Read our helpful articles on Greenpet website** and formulate a plan to eliminate problems caused by your pasture.

READ MORE

Creating a Dry Lot Track

A dry lot is a **100% grass free zone.**

If you need to move your horse off their pasture, then creating a 'dry lot or track' is one way to do so.

This may be a large yard, round pen or area which can double as an arena. It might be a long strip beside the hedge or the trees or it might take the form of a perimeter 'track' around the paddock.

Places with good drainage lend themselves to being made into a dry lot. Otherwise, it is very worthwhile (and economical in the long run) to invest some resources into making a 'proper' dry lot which won't go muddy in the rain and where the grass doesn't keep poking through necessitating regular spraying.

The best dry lots have an all-weather surface at least on some of the area, horse safe fences and shade or shelter.

It is worthwhile noting, tracks and dry lots may not be suitable for breeding horses, mares, and foals. They may also not be suitable for large numbers of horses as they will require more room to run.

What is the purpose of a dry lot?

It is a safe option for your horse to go to when the grass is not suitable. Certain times of the year such as Spring, Autumn, frosty mornings or after drought breaking rain!

Having a 'grass-free' area available enables you to customise your horse's access to grass as needed.

What is essential for a track or dry lot?

It should incorporate choices for the horse such as shade, shelter, water, and hay stations. Horses must have access to ad-lib hay. Fencing must be safe. The tracks should be at least 5-6 metres wide at the narrowest points and electric fencing is a good option. You must also make sure that there are no dead ends on your track.

It is also important to keep your track 100% grass free. For people who have horse/ ponies or donkeys prone to or recovering from laminitis, it is imperative that their living area is and stays 100% GRASS FREE!

There is a lot more information regarding this on the internet and in books. You can easily research this topic and see if it will work for your property. We also have more information on our Greenpet Website.

www.greenpet.com.au

Ask our Naturopath a Quick Horse Question