

New Research Shows Colonic Ulcers Significant Risk for Performance Horses

Study Finds that 54% of all Performance Horses have Multiple Ulcer Types

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Aurora, OH (March 8, 2005)—Recently published research has revealed the presence of ulcers in the colons of performance horses. According to the study, conducted by Frank Pellegrini, DVM, 63% of horses involved in competition sports—ranging from dressage to racing—suffered from colonic ulceration.

Pellegrini's work confirmed the findings of earlier studies, showing that 87% of horses have gastric ulcers (ulcers of the stomach). When combined with his findings on the lesser-understood issue of colonic ulcers, however, his study demonstrated two startling facts. He found that 54% of performance horses suffered from *both* gastric and colonic ulcers. Further, Pellegrini's study showed that 97% of performance horses had some type of ulceration¹.

"This research suggests that ulceration in the colon may be to blame for the low grade anemia, colic and other conditions seen frequently in high performance horses," said Pellegrini. "Most importantly, it brings into focus the need for further research on the direct causes of colonic ulcers and how exactly they affect the horse."

Pellegrini's research proves that colonic ulcers exist prevalently within the performance horse population. Unfortunately, no treatment now available can

cure them. Omeprazole, used for gastric ulcers, was formulated for the specific conditions found inside the stomach and will not positively affect the delicate colonic environment.

“Given that more than 60 percent of all performance horses may be suffering from colonic ulceration—which cannot be treated with traditional ulcer medications—it may be time for equine caregivers to consider other options,” said Pellegrini. “A dietary supplement intended to maintain optimum digestive tract health may be the best solution to preventing colonic ulcers before they negatively affect performance and attitude in the horse.”

One approach to promoting overall digestive tract health involves the use of non-testable, natural foodstuffs to heal the intestinal tract and support good health throughout this critical system. Here is a quick summary of some substances and how they may work to help keep the horse’s gut healthy:

- **Beta glucan** is a dietary fiber found in oats and barley that has been shown to slow down the movement of feed through the gut, allowing excess starches to be digested before they enter the colon. Beta glucan is also a powerful immune stimulant, encouraging the horse’s immune system to attack any bacteria that might otherwise enter an ulcer.
- **Polar lipids** are found in specially-processed oat oil. Lipids (or fats) help to protect the lining of the gut. Polar lipids are emulsifiers – they help water and oil to mix, and therefore allow certain oil-soluble vitamins, such as A, D, E and K, to be absorbed by the gut.
- **Glutamine** is a natural amino acid that may help the gut renew and heal itself. It is “conditionally essential”—meaning that the body cannot produce enough of this amino acid when it is undergoing stressful situations, such as heavy competition training. Glutamine assists the cells of the gut to grow close together, keeping out dangerous micro-organisms.
- **Threonine** is another amino acid. It is “essential”—meaning that the body doesn’t produce enough on its own, so it must be supplied in the feed. Threonine is needed for the creation of mucus, which lines the stomach and intestines, protecting them from acidic digestive juices.
- **Yeast sugars** called mannan oligosaccharides (or MOS, for short) help the immune system to get rid of bad bacteria. MOS also absorb dangerous toxins so they can be safely excreted.

Each of these natural substances has its own role to play in equine digestion. Used together, as part of an overall preventive health care program, they can help support optimal digestive health for the performance horse—keeping them healthier, from the inside, out.

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1. Pellegrini, Franklin L. Results of a Large-Scale Necroscopic Study of Equine Colonic Ulcers. *J Equine Vet Sci* 2005; 25 (3) 113-117.

****Editors: You may request an interview with Dr. Frank Pellegrini by calling Teresa Jascob at Equine Resources International, 610-444-7554 or teresa@equineresources.com. Images are available by visiting www.equineresources.com in the Equine Writers' Resource section, or by request through Teresa.**