

Ask the Experts

Q: I suspect that my horse has some food allergies. Is this common? What can I do about it?

A: Food allergies seem to be quite common in horses. Horses can develop allergies to most feed ingredients. Thus, to control the reaction in your horse, it will be necessary to identify the feeds that cause the reaction. This can be done by trial and error, or an allergy test series can be conducted by some veterinarians. If you elect to test by trial and error, put your horse on local hay or pasture and feed oats and a mineral supplement. If the problem goes away, you can gradually add back other common ingredients until you get a reaction from your animal. If the horse has difficulty from the initial diet, substitute corn or barley for the oats, or try a different forage. Remember: corn has considerably more energy than oats, so feed less. Once you have identified the ingredients that your horse will tolerate, an appropriate formulation can be prepared for your animal. Sometimes a commercial product will be available that does not contain the offending ingredient. (Ask your feed company if it guarantees a fixed formulation on the products you feed your horse.) Other times you will have to formulate an appropriate feed on the farm. Remember that nutrient balance is important to your animal so get help if you need assistance.

Q: My horse suffers from HYPP. What should I feed to help her cope with this disorder?

A: HYPP, or hyperkalemic periodic paralysis, is a genetic disorder in Quarter Horses and other breeds that cross with Quarter Horses. HYPP causes an error in the sodium pump in the muscles. The disorder can be traced to a stallion named Impressive. Genetic tests are available to identify and confirm the problem. HYPP-positive horses develop paralysis when exercised. The episode is brought on by an elevated blood potassium level, and blood potassium is diagnostic. To help the horse cope with the problem, you must keep potassium intake low and consistent. The biggest enemy to the horse is a high potassium meal. If you can support the horse's energy needs with oats, a mineral supplement and grass hay, you will minimize the potassium intake. Avoid alfalfa hay, molasses and feeds with added potassium. Pasture seems to be the forage of choice when it is available because intake is spread over the entire day and is less likely to cause a potassium peak. HYPP-positive horses fed the proper diet and receiving appropriate medication can be useful animals for many years. Ask your veterinarian help you with this problem