# Batwings, Foo Foo Dust and Unicorn Poo – De-bunking Myths of Supplements

The title this month is an old saying in the nutrition business, of seeing new products on the market which have ingredients that don't have, do not or have not yet been proven to be effective and perhaps safe for the consumption of horses.

I would divide supplements into two categories;

One; for general health and wellbeing, to meet the nutrient requirements of the average healthy horse. These are determined by the National Research Council and are reviewed by a team of learned professors every 5-7 years.

The second; are for specific reasons or problems with your animal such as electrolyte imbalances, or hoof or joint problems.

**Before adding a supplement**

Before adding a supplement to your horse's diet you need to determine firstly what your horses' requirements are, and what you are requiring this supplement for? For a general health and wellbeing supplement designed to meet the requirements of your horse you need to audit what you are actually feeding your horse now before adding this supplement. Most nutritionists have access to a calculation tool such as Microsteed that can determine your horses' requirements and calculate the nutrients you are providing them with your current diet. You then, with the advice of your nutritionist or veterinarian determine whether your horse requires an additional supplement or just tweak the diet to meet the nutritional requirements of your horse.

Often if you are feeding a prepared feed as well as several supplements you may in fact be malnourishing your horse, as you may have completely unbalanced your horses' diet. Many minerals have relationships which affect the uptake and availability of these minerals such as Calcium and Phosphorous or Copper and Zinc.

**Types of supplements**

There are several types of supplements that have had numerous research papers presented over the years. Electrolyte replacers, as the name suggests, should be fed as replacers not as a loading dose for upcoming activity. Essentially electrolytes control the electrical pathways of the animal and if they are out of balance muscles and other organs will not react as efficiently as they should, resulting in a reduced performance and in an extreme case start to affect the health of the animal.

Electrolyte replacers should essentially be a basic substitution of what is lost as sweat. You should look for active levels of the main electrolytes such as Sodium, Chloride, Magnesium and Potassium. Make sure these are nearly all of the supplement and little to no fillers. You actually want to pay for what your horse needs.

**Development of hoof structure**

There has been much research on the role several key nutrients play in the development and redevelopment of hoof structure. The key nutrients to look for are biotin, zinc, copper and manganese and well as essential amino acids such as methionine. I would suggest looking for a supplement that contains around 15-20mg of biotin per dose. With regards to the other minerals consult a nutritionist to ensure mineral levels and ratios are still within a tolerance.

**What about joints?**

There are now numerous joint products on the market with many ingredients such as glucosamine, chondroitin, MSM, green lipped muscle, shark cartilage, pig's trachea, Devils Claw Root, and Turmeric and black pepper. The jury is still out on the effectiveness of some of these products, however there are some trials to encourage further investigation of these nutracueticals. It is important to look for the active levels of the ingredients. 10,000mg of shark cartilage is not the same as 10,000mg of glucosamine.

Herbal products have been long used in the equine. Some research has been done on their effectiveness, with some herbal ingredients being banned by equestrian and racing authorities. Again I would like to see the active levels of the herb being quoted such as capsaicin for capsicum or curcumin for turmeric. This gives the manufacturers of the highest quality products a clear difference instead of someone producing a product with a product with no know quality standards.

There are a multitude of products out on the market. Before you try these you should ensure they are safe to feed your horse, there is no contra – indications of feeding this new product with your current diets. It should not contravene anti-doping rules of your equestrian organisation and for my personal view must be of benefit to your horse back by some considerable and replicated research.

My take home message is to consult your veterinarian and nutritionist and if your horse is healthy ask yourself this question 'Does your horse really need this new supplement?'

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