

Get the balance RIGHT

If you give more than one feed supplement to your horse, you could be doubling up on ingredients says equine nutritionist **Alexandra Wesker**

OUR EXPERT

Alexandra Wesker



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“This one is for energy. This one is for his coat. And this one is for digestive health...” you may be thinking as you sprinkle powder and pour liquid into your horse’s feed bucket.

Many owners provide multiple feeds and supplements for a variety of reasons. For example, the horse may have a specific medical issue, such as arthritis. Or, the owner feels a supplement is needed to calm the horse down, to help develop muscle, or support beneficial bacteria in the gut.

In general, supplements are great for meeting nutritional requirements – if you know what it is you need to target – as they tend to be more specific than other manufactured feeds.

However, the more products and supplements you give, the more likely it is the ingredients will overlap.

Not only could you be wasting money by doubling up, you may be feeding more than the recommended levels of certain substances.

Although individual ingredients in supplements may have health benefits, doubling up on some things is not necessarily good and may have harmful effects.

Another thing you need to take into consideration is that if you feed several supplements for the same purpose, you may not be able to tell which one is having the desired effect.

Meeting his needs

Before adding something to your horse’s diet, ask yourself the following three questions:-

1. What is my reason for feeding it?

If your horse has a particular need, or a product has been suggested by a farrier or vet, then supplements are worth considering.

Feeding them for non-specific purposes, however, is not recommended. For example, if you are feeding multiple supplements because everyone else does, or because you have a feeling your horse will generally benefit, you are more likely to waste money. You could also potentially compromise his health.



Did you KNOW
One survey of horse owners discovered that some horses were fed up to 12 supplements at a time!

TIP from the TOP
Always read the label before purchase. Ingredients must be listed on supplement labels, in order of inclusion.

Check the ingredients if you give your horse more than one feed supplement

2. Is a supplement really necessary?

It pays to check whether nutritional supplementation is actually required in your horse’s case.

Grass and forage – such as hay or haylage – may already be meeting his nutritional (and energy) demands.

Additional hard feeds which supply a broad spectrum of vitamins and minerals may provide important nutrients that could be missing, but can double up with your horse’s roughage.

You can find out how suitable your forage is for your horse by having hay or haylage analysed. This service is offered by independent laboratories and some feed companies.

Feeding supplements based on an analysis is more specific and can lead to a better balanced diet and reduction in feed costs.

3. Will I be doubling up on ingredients?

Giving your horse a supplement for a specific purpose makes it less likely to double up on ingredients with other products you may be feeding, but it can still happen.

Always check ingredient lists on labels carefully, and note the amount that the product contains.

Avoid feeding multiple supplements with similar ingredients, especially if each supplement is fed according to its maximum recommended daily intake.

There is also the chance that hard feeds and supplements offer similar nutrients to what is in your horse’s grass or forage.

Roughage, especially fresh grass, provides a lot of high-quality protein and vitamins.

Supplementation is likely to provide excess protein and vitamins, unless grass is past its best, or if requirements are high, such

as for breeding mares, or in horses that are performing at a high level.

One supplement that should always be supplied is a salt lick, in both the stable and the field. Salt licks provide sodium and chloride, which are the first minerals to be limited in forage.

Horses tend to use salt licks as much as they need to, making supplementation very easy.

Consider your options

Some nutritional additives are fed to change how a horse behaves. But bear in mind that behaviour is affected by many factors, only one of which is nutrition. ▶



Grass and hay can be enough to meet a horse’s nutritional needs

Horse sense Supplements



Giving a horse or pony longer turnout time can have a positive effect on behaviour

TIP from the TOP

Oil is ideal for enhancing coat shine. Feed linseed or rapeseed oil instead of sunflower – they contain lower levels of saturated fat and are better sources of omega-three.

For example, a horse may be excitable when handled or ridden, because he is stabled for long periods of time.

Even if giving him a calmer helps reduce any unwanted behaviour, it is not addressing the cause.

Instead, consider turning the horse out for longer, or varying his routine to include different activities, like lungeing, long-reining or spending time on the horse walker.

Physical issues, such as promoting muscle growth or joint health, generally require further action than solely adding a scoop of a supplement.

For example, a supplement that contains the right ingredients can support muscle development, but correct training and dietary energy are also vital.

In the same way, products aimed to relieve respiratory issues will have only a minor effect if a horse continues to be fed dusty hay or is kept for long periods in a non-ventilated stable.

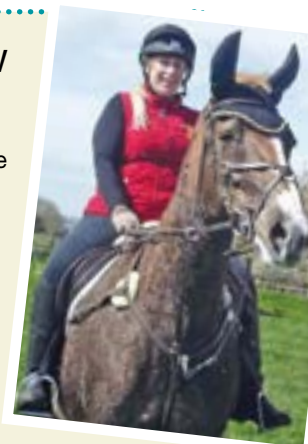
A supplement alone does not do the job in these cases and goes hand-in-hand with good management. Having said that, biotin for healthy hooves and oil for a shiny coat can do their job without further action required. ■

CASE STUDY

Diet review

Horse: Chance.

Diet: Chance, 26, goes out during the day, and is stabled with ad-lib hay at night. She has a glucosamine supplement for joint support, Farrier's Formula for hoof quality and cider vinegar and brewer's yeast for gut health. In addition, she gets a multivitamin, herbs, turmeric, garlic and sunflower oil.



Alexandra's analysis

As Chance has continuous access to fresh pasture or hay, her mineral requirements are likely to be covered. A multi-vitamin may be useful in winter.

Chance's owner, Becci, says she feeds herbs to provide minerals. Herbs have a higher mineral content than grass, but because of the small portions the effect is negligible. From a nutritional point of view, there is little use in adding the herbs.

Farrier's Formula almost entirely covers the average horse's daily requirements for trace elements copper, zinc, iodine and cobalt, if dosed according to the guidelines. If there has been an improvement in hoof quality since feeding the supplement, it is a good idea to keep it, but the dosage needs reviewing if grass and hay quality changes.

It would be worth Becci setting a specific purpose for feeding turmeric and garlic, and then assessing if they are meeting that need.

Brewer's yeast and cider vinegar are given "for gut health". Brewer's yeast is also an ingredient in the hoof product, but is unlikely to be problematic due to the quantities fed.

Due to the amount of forage in the diet, Chance is unlikely to need gut support, unless she has a specific issue.

Becci could gradually phase out the cider vinegar and brewer's yeast supplements from Chance's diet to see if it affects her droppings.

Joint health is a long-term aim and a good-quality supplement can support this. Supplements seem more successful when containing chondroitin as well as glucosamine, so it is worth checking that they are both present in a product.

WHERE SUPPLEMENTS CAN OVERLAP

TYPE OF SUPPLEMENT	COMMON INGREDIENTS	LIKELY TO OVERLAP WITH...
Joint	Glucosamine, chondroitin, MSM (methylsulphonylmethane) and HA (hyaluronic acid).	Supplements which are aimed at reducing inflammation, such as respiratory products.
Digestion	Prebiotics, probiotics and yeast.	Many manufactured horse feeds.
Muscle	Protein sources, minerals and anti-inflammatories.	Conditioning feeds and fresh grass.
Electrolytes	Chloride, sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium.	Feed balancers. Many other supplements also contain electrolytes.
Respiratory	Glycerin, MSM and sources of antioxidants, including herbs, minerals and vitamins.	Respiratory, hoof and joint supplements often overlap. If you wish to support multiple issues, then look for an all-in-one product. If you feed multiple supplements, check for doubling up on zinc and selenium in particular.
Calmer	Magnesium and lecithin.	Magnesium is found in many manufactured products. If doubling up cannot be avoided, stick to a maximum of five grams per day (based on a medium-size Thoroughbred) to help prevent overfeeding.