Electrolyte Supplements for Horses 101

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Help **hydrate** your horse

A 1000-lb horse at rest drinks about 10 gallons of water a day. In stressful situations such as traveling, breeding, or heavy training horses may not be taking in all the fluids that they need. One of the main concerns of a horse owner should be proper electrolyte balance and hydration. Electrolytes are electrically charged minerals such as sodium (Na) and potassium (K).

Importance of Maintaining Electrolytes

Horses depend on electrolytes to maintain the balance and flow of vital body fluids, the transmission of nerve impulses, and the healthy function of the muscles and the circulatory system. Because some electrolytes, such as sodium and chloride, are in short supply in basic feedstuffs like hay and grain, it is important to provide a salt block, or, preferably, a granular salt for horses to use on a free choice basis.

Electrolyte Balance and Hydration Go Hand in Hand

However, during periods of training, performance, and high temperatures and humidity, horses lose large quantities of electrolytes through sweat. Unlike human sweat, equine sweat is hypertonic; it contains a higher level of electrolytes and water than the blood plasma. The loss of such large quantities of water and electrolytes means that horses require serious attention to their water and electrolyte intake to maintain optimum fitness during intensive work. In these conditions, horses, like human athletes, need additional electrolytes added to their daily diet.

Times when horses need additional electrolytes include:

- Intense training schedule
- Travel
- Increased temperature or humidity
- Shows, racing, endurance rides, or other competition
- Increased sweating for other reasons

In order to maintain a healthy electrolyte balance, fresh water must be accessible at all times and electrolytes should be given when necessary. Electrolyte supplements for horses come in several forms including paste, gel, powder, and nuggets. Many are easily added to food or mixed with water. They also come in horses' favorite flavors such as apple, alfalfa, molasses, and orange.

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