

WHEN GOOD JOINTS GO BAD

DOES YOUR HORSE NEED A ZERK FITTING?

If horses were mechanical, it would be easy. Have a dry joint? Drill a hole, insert a zerk (grease) fitting and lubricate. With horses there are limited options when joints go bad.

A veterinarian may recommend injections of corticosteroid, hyaluronic acid (Legend®, Hylartin® and Synacid®) or poly-sulfated glycosaminoglycans (Adequan®) directly in the joint. This is the closest we can come to a zerk fitting.

Another option is oral supplements.

Keep in mind these products are not regulated. There are no guidelines for daily requirements, the manufacturers are not held accountable for ingredients or claims and little research has been done at reputable equine facilities.

But the ingredients seem to be safe and not cause a toxic reaction. Research has been done on human products with good results; hence the cross-over to horse usage.

Study oral equine joint supplement labels and notice products have one or more of the following ingredients:

Hyaluronic Acid (HA) occurs naturally in the synovial fluid which lubricates the joint. Veterinarians have injected it directly in to the affected joint for years with good results. HA is now available in oral form as an ingredient in some over-the-counter supplements.

Chondroitin Sulfate occurs naturally in the connective tissue and bones. It stimulates the production of molecules, which make up cartilage. Chondroitin sulfate gives cartilage elasticity, strength and resilience.

Glucosamine HCl is important to the body's production of hyaluronic acid and chondroitin sulfate. Without adequate amounts of glucosamine the production of these components within the body would shut down.

Methylsulfonylmethane (MSM) occurs naturally in body tissue and fluids. In addition to being present in the synovial fluid surrounding the joints, it is also

found in mucous secretions of the respiratory system.

Perna Mussel is an edible species of shell fish. It is rich in glycosaminoglycans (GAGS).

Yucca extract may reduce arthritis symptoms. It is thought it may block the release of toxins from the intestines that inhibit the normal formation of cartilage.

These are all natural components of synovial fluid, cartilage and connective tissue. They are called glycosaminoglycans (GAGS).

The goal of the supplement is to replace, repair or support these components.

When introducing a joint supplement, a loading dose will usually be recommended. This dose is greater than the daily-recommended maintenance dose. Once the loading dose period has passed the dosage may be decreased, according to the horse's comfort level.

In addition to supplements, management plays an important part in reducing joint pain. Proper diet will provide the necessary nutrients needed for a healthy body. Overweight horses must lose the unnecessary pounds which put additional stress on the compromised joint.

Light daily exercise is a must. Exercise will stimulate blood-flow and keep the surrounding muscles strong, helping to support the joint. Proper shoeing and trimming is imperative. If the hoof is out of balance increased stress will be put on the joint. The surface the horse stands upon must be resilient and forgiving. Do not allow a horse with joint pain to stand on concrete. Stall mats and adequate bedding must be provided.

Common sense must be part of the management plan. If a horse is in pain because of deteriorating joints masking the pain so he can continue to perform is not humane. It may be time to retire or change the expected activity level of the horse. Continuing to damage the joint to win a prize is not good horsemanship.

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www.EquineStudiesInstitute.com

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