

DRESSAGE, EVENTING, HUNTERS, JUMPERS

VOL. 53

PRACTICAL HORSEMAN

EXTRA

TIPS FOR GALLOPING SAFELY

6 Steps to Protect Gut Health



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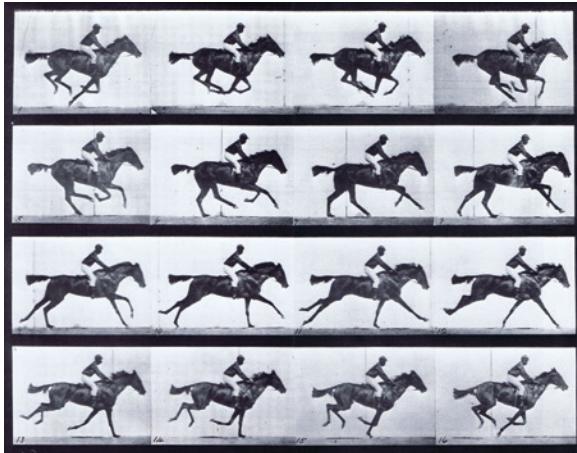
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The horse that matters to you matters to us[®]

Gone Away!

Jim shares his “slow and safe” approach to learning to ride your horse at the gallop.

Come to think of it, I have lived most of my life at the gallop ... the important parts, anyway. My first memories are of horses, and most of those memories involve speed. I have been lucky enough to spend my life with horses and done many different things with them, but the only times I feel truly comfortable on horseback are when I rise up off my four-legged pal's back, he breaks into a gallop and we head out into the country with a “let's see what happens next” attitude. Galloping in partnership with half a ton of living, moving, graceful, athletic creature gives me a thrill that I would never be able to get from a pet hamster.



Until 1878, horsemen argued about the mechanics of a horse's gallop. Some said the horse always had at least one foot on the ground while others said there was an instant when the horse had all four feet off the ground. An apocryphal story says that the photographs above were taken to settle a bet by business tycoon and former California Governor Leland Stanford, who hired a photographer named Eadweard Muybridge to take photos of a horse at the gallop. Sallie Gardiner, ridden at roughly 36 miles per hour by a jockey named Domm (his other names are lost to posterity), settled the question. You can clearly see from Muybridge's photos that Sallie has a period of suspension in her gallop. The photos were taken at the training track at Stanford's Palo Alto, California, horse-breeding farm, which is now the Stanford University campus.

Galloping Mechanics

I appreciate my horse's other three paces: walk, trot and canter. My father, quoting a U.S. Cavalry conditioning axiom, said that a rider should “walk for muscle, trot for balance and gallop for wind.” Each of these paces has its use, and certainly you can improve your horse's wind using the canter—but the canter and the gallop are distinctly different due to mechanics and velocity.

Mechanically speaking, the canter has three beats followed by a period of suspension. When we speak of a horse cantering on the left lead, for example, we mean that his left, or “leading” front

foot will touch the ground last. The sequence of footfalls for the left-lead canter is right hind foot, then left hind foot and right forefoot touching the ground at the same time as a diagonal pair, and finally, the left forefoot touching the ground, followed by a period of suspension. The scientific description of this suspended phase of the canter is called the “unsupported transition.”

In contrast, the sequence for the gallop is four beats followed by a period of suspension. Horsemen describe a horse as galloping on a “lead,” using the same characteristic as the canter: the lead is determined by the forefoot that touches the ground last, meaning that the left foreleg will reach farther forward than the right foreleg. The sequence of the footfalls of a horse galloping on his left lead will be right hind foot, left hind foot, right forefoot, left forefoot, followed by a period of suspension when all four feet are off the ground.

Before 1878, most horsemen believed that the galloping horse always had at least one foot on the ground. A photographer named Eadweard Muybridge used an early version of stop-action photography to prove that there is a period of flight—an unsupported transition—during the gallop. More than a century later, the London Royal Veterinary College followed up this early scientific research with a series of studies to determine the most efficient galloping position for the rider.

Thanks to science, we now have a more complete understanding of both our horse's movement at the gallop and of the galloping position that keeps us in the closest harmony with the horse.

Depending on your horse's individual paces and conformation, he will change from a canter to a gallop at about 600 meters per minute or about 20 miles an hour. According to some of the web

Jim competed in three Olympic Games and two World Championships. He also won the U.S. National Championship five times on five different horses. He was a highly respected coach. For decades beginning in 1978, he had at least one student on every United States Olympic, World Championship and Pan American Team.



HUNTER MESSINEO



© AMY K. DRAGOO

The pulley rein is a very strong aid and should be used only in emergencies. To apply the left pulley rein, place your right hand all the way across your horse's neck. Simultaneously press your left hand straight down toward your horse's left shoulder and bring it straight back toward the point of your left hip. As your horse responds by slowing down, soften your reins as a reward for the correct response. Practice this in the arena at a slow rate of speed before you attempt it at the gallop and make sure you are equally adept with both hands.

sites I visited while planning this column, the top speed an equine can attain for a short distance is 44 mph. If you have been reading my columns for a while, you will know better than to believe everything you read, but you can comfort yourself with the knowledge that regardless of how fast you think you are going, you really are only traveling at about half the maximum possible speed of horses. Small comfort, for sure, but there it is.

Galloping Safety

OK, now you know what a gallop is—what's next? Because I want you to be safe and secure, we need to talk about your position before you actually gallop. But even before we talk about your position, we'll talk about using your head about your first galloping experience. If you have never ridden the gallop, then you should absolutely not borrow your

friend's 4-year-old off-the-track Thoroughbred and “take it for a little gallop” because in doing so, you will have created a potentially dangerous experience for yourself. Chances are, if you survive getting badly run away with, you will never again ride outside the confines of an arena.

If this is your first experience riding out of an arena or if in the past you have only trail-ridden at the walk, we need to take the “learning to gallop” process slowly. Your first galloping experience should be on a horse who can be kicked into a gallop but will slow down the moment you stop kicking. I'm not sure you should have another horse galloping with you at the same time because even placid horses can find galloping in company exciting. In that event you might find yourself involved in a spontaneous horse race, which is not the point of the exercise.

When I introduce you to the gallop, I will first make sure you are competent trotting and cantering around a large field. The hay field between my stables and my house is about 35 acres, and I have always found that to be sufficient. You might be the sort of rider with little

or no experience outside the confines of an arena and you have to be mentally adjusted before continuing the lesson.

Learn to Judge Your Speed

Find a suitable galloping area with enough room for the wider turns you will need to make as your speed increases over the next month or so. I am going to assume your field has excellent footing and is free of hazards such as rocks and groundhog holes because the quickest way to make a sound horse lame is to step in a hole or gallop him on bad footing.

Measure a 400-meter “speed trap” in your galloping area and put markers down at the beginning and the end of that measured distance. Make sure you can see the markers as you approach. (I use meters rather than yards or feet because most of the competitions I prepare riders for use metric measurements.) I set 400 meters as the beginning distance of my speed trap because it is a fast show-jumping speed and most riders will be comfortable cantering at this speed.

Pretty simple so far, right? But wait—although 400 mpm is not much greater than you are already used to, shorten



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I teach people to use a double cross also called a double bridge when they have to gallop a horse who takes a fierce hold of the bit. The “double” means that the rider has both reins in both hands. Adjust the reins to keep the distance between your hands to a minimum. To illustrate the technique, this rider has lifted her hands, but when you use a double bridge, place your hands firmly against your horse's neck. Once you establish that position, your horse soon discovers that he is pulling against himself, and most of the time he will relax and settle into a steady rhythm.



The single bridge, or single cross, is easier to adjust than the double bridge. For that reason, I usually recommend this technique rather than doubling the reins. When you use the single bridge, you hold both reins in one hand and one rein in the other hand. Adjust the reins so that your thumbs almost touch. Here, the rider's hands have been lifted to illustrate the single bridge, but when you use it, place your hands firmly against your horse's neck. Make sure he is pulling against himself, rather than against you.

your stirrup length approximately 1 inch. You should be able to maintain your two-point position, where your seat is above but close to the saddle without resting your knuckles against your horse's neck for balance. With your stirrup leathers adjusted and with vertical stirrup leathers, test yourself at the halt: Rise out of your saddle as if you were posting at the trot, then pause at the top of that motion. Now cross your arms in front of you and keep your balance there for longer and longer periods of time without using your arms to steady yourself. This is more difficult for you to do than it is for me to say. I plan to spend several lessons preparing you both mentally and physically for riding at speed, and shorter stirrups will help you improve your fitness. You will find the shorter stirrups make your thighs and the small of your back become fatigued much more quickly than usual.

Once stirrups are set to the shorter

length, canter back and forth through your speed trap, noting the time for each exercise—400 mpm should take you one minute. You may have to train him to accelerate during this section instead of cantering.

Remember, learning to gallop faster is going to be a slow process. Once you can accurately canter through the 400-meter speed trap in one minute, measure a new speed trap with markers 450 meters apart in a different location in the field. Once again you will try to cover the distance in one minute. (You can see the progression I use to develop your ability to ride at speed.) Each time I ask you to go faster through the speed trap, shorten your stirrup leathers an additional inch (roughly an inch shorter for every additional 100 mpm, up to 600 mpm). The faster you gallop, the shorter you have to ride and the more you need to close your hip angle to stay with your horse's motion.

Chances are your horse will start to anticipate the speed traps and you

will have to train him to wait before he goes back through the faster speed trap. Try to stay ahead of him mentally as well as physically.

Using the Pulley Rein

Note that your horse will get fitter during this process and his increased fitness may reflect itself in his other activities. Horses who previously cantered around Baby Novice cross-country courses on a loose rein may wake up and take a keen interest in the sport. This can be fun, but you need to change your training practices as your horse changes. That's why I want you to know how to use a pulley rein because it is a very useful tool when you are having difficulty controlling your horse's speed.

If your horse is not listening to your usual aids to slow down, shorten your reins slightly, put your left hand all the way across your horse's neck in front of his withers and press your left hand down toward his right shoulder. At the same time, bring your right hand straight back toward your right hip. As your horse slows, make sure to reward him with soft reins so that he understands what you want.

I hope you will soon feel the joy that galloping produces. I enjoy everything about horses—training them in dressage, teaching them to remain calm and balanced during their show-jumping rounds and introducing them to their first water experience. But I find a complete sense of freedom only when my horse and I are gone away, galloping toward some invisible horizon. Each time he floats through the air, I am for an instant free from problems, free from critical coaches and unhappy people, free from flat tires and expensive truck repairs, free from the laws of gravity and velocity, free from earthly constraints. 🐾

For more galloping information, read additional columns by Jim "The Science of Galloping" and "Speed Magnifies Mistakes" at www.PracticalHorsemanMag.com.

Muscle function is key to top performance

Rhythm, relaxation, connection and impulsion are the goals of every rider. It takes adequate fitness, careful training and a healthy muscle function to achieve these goals. Poor muscle development, lactic acid build-up and a lack of antioxidant reserves can leave a horse unwilling to go forward and lacking in stamina during training, followed by stiffness and soreness after work.

As horses are asked to work harder, antioxidant requirements and lactic acid levels increase in muscle cells. Short-term deficits in antioxidants such as vitamin E and selenium can result in training difficulties, and long-term deficiencies can lead to poor muscle development and even neurological deficits.

Supplying the nutrients needed to support healthy muscle function is the key to successful development of a dressage horse. Essential nutrients such as natural vitamin E, selenium, chromium and B complex vitamins support muscle development and functionality.

Natural vitamin E and selenium are the most powerful antioxidants utilized by the equine muscle. They work together to reduce oxidative stress that impairs cellular function. This reduces the incidence of stiffness and soreness. Horses with adequate antioxidant reserves develop faster, have more stamina and fewer muscle disorders, and can also have less mental anxiety caused by fatigue and sore muscles. Horses are happier and more willing to work.

Chromium has been shown in studies to help exercising horses clear glucose faster, and it supports lower levels of lactic acid in muscle. Lactic acid hastens fatigue. Lower lactic acid levels improve stamina. Exercise increases a horse's chromium requirements. In particular, horses with a history of RER (tying up) can benefit from supplemental chromium.

Horses in training can also benefit from additional B complex vitamins. Horses in light work and at rest synthesize enough B vitamins in their guts to meet their requirements. Hard-working horses that are under the stress of training and competing may not be able to meet their requirements on their own. Additional supplementation ensures increased needs are met.

Supporting healthy muscles in the dressage horse is one of the main keys to success when developing a top performer.

Nutrient	Suggested levels for horses in training
Natural vitamin E as d-alpha-tocopherol	2000 IU to 5000 IU per day
Organic selenium	1 mg to 3 mg per day in total diet
Organic chromium	5 mg per day



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Your Program:

- Achieve rhythm, relaxation, connection and impulsion.
- Develop appropriate level of fitness.
- Maintain physical and mental health.

Your Supplements:

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Metaboleeze™

- Maintains hard-working muscles by supporting optimal muscle metabolism and lower levels of lactic acid.
- Supplies B complex vitamins, trace minerals and organic chromium.

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6 Steps to Protect Gut Health

Good choices in feed and management are the key.

BY ELAINE PASCOE WITH LIARA GONZALEZ, DVM, PHD, DACVS

What are your horse's odds of developing colic or gastric ulcers? The answer may depend in large part on you. "Gut issues are always a threat to horses, but you can take steps to reduce the risk," says Liara Gonzalez, DVM, PhD, DACVS, an assistant professor focusing on gastroenterology and equine surgery at North Carolina State University.

To protect your horse from GI threats, she advises, start by copying nature in what, when and how you feed him. In this article Dr. Gonzalez outlines six steps that will put you on the right path.

1. FEED FORAGE

You can meet most of your horse's nutritional needs with high-fiber forage, like hay and grass. "Forage is the most natural food source for horses," Dr. Gonzalez says, "and the act of chewing and eating forage stimulates the gut."

After all, your horse is a grazing animal, built to roam around munching grass all day. His entire GI tract is designed to process small amounts of forage continuously. A steady flow of chewed forage soaks up digestive juices in the stomach and buffers acidity that could cause gastric ulcers. Farther along, in the cecum and hindgut, helpful microbes break down fibrous plant material and extract nutrients.

Steady forage intake helps keep the horse's gut microbes in

Help your horse avoid gastric issues by keeping him in the most natural routine possible, with plenty of turnout, a high-fiber diet and a consistent feeding schedule.





◀ A steady forage intake can help keep equine digestive issues at bay.

Digestive Supplements

Search online and you'll find dozens of different digestive supplements for horses. There are products with probiotics (live bacteria and yeasts thought to aid digestion), prebiotics (enzymes and yeast extracts to nourish those microbes), amino acids such as glutamine and threonine, antacids such as bicarbonate, psyllium (to help lubricate the colon and move material through) and more.

Speak with your veterinarian if you think a supplement might help your horse and do research before you buy, says Dr. Liara Gonzalez, DVM, PhD, DACVS. "Ask: Where is the data? Some companies have paid researchers to conduct tests to support their claims. That doesn't mean the results are not valuable but find out what kind of testing was done and if the results were published." Studies can be published in peer-reviewed scientific publications.

Quality is another issue. Products from established makers are generally more likely to be consistent from batch to batch, but there's little oversight of supplements. For the same reason, Dr. Gonzalez cautions against using compounded versions in place of FDA-approved gastric-ulcer medications.

How will you know if the supplement you choose helps your horse? "First decide what benefit you're looking for and what will be your metric of success," Dr. Gonzalez says. "Then change one thing and see." Knowing what you want from the supplement and how you will measure improvement will help make your assessment less subjective.

balance and his gut functioning as it should. When horses are stalled and fed intermittently, risks of colic and gastric ulcers begin to rise. Here's what to do:

- Maintain pasture. Green pasture is a great source of nutrients for most horses. (For some, too much green grass increases the risk of laminitis, an inflammatory disease that weakens the bond between the hoof wall and the underlying bone. Hay is a better forage choice for them.)
- Feed hay free choice when good pasture isn't available or appropriate. "Offer hay all the time," Dr. Gonzalez says. This mimics the horse's natural foraging habits and helps keep his GI tract running smoothly. Most horses easily consume 2 percent of their body weight in hay daily.
- Test forage quality. Hay should be pliable, sweet-smelling, and free of weeds, mold and dust—but those qualities don't tell you much about its nutrient content, which can vary widely. "Your state Cooperative Extension Service or land-grant university can analyze hay or pasture grass and tell you what it provides nutritionally," Dr. Gonzalez says. (If you buy hay by the bale, ask your suppliers if they test. Your Extension office may also have information on typical nutrients in hay grown in your region.)
- Tailor forage choices to your horse's specific needs. For example, including some alfalfa in forage may help a horse who is prone to gastric ulcers. Research shows that alfalfa hay can lower stomach acidity for as long as five hours after feeding.
- "If your horse is overweight or tends that way, give him 'chewing hay' that's less nutritionally dense but still good quality. He'll have something to put in his stomach without taking in so many calories," Dr. Gonzalez says. Slow-feeder hay nets and bags are another way to give horses constant



▲ Make any changes in the type or amount of your horse's diet gradually.

access to hay without risking unhealthy weight gain.

“Overweight is as bad as underweight when it comes to health, so be aware of body condition and adjust your feeding program accordingly. Use a weight tape to monitor changes in weight,” Dr. Gonzalez suggests. A tape doesn't give an accurate measure of actual weight, but it will let you see if the horse is gaining or losing. If you're worried that he'll be short on vitamins and minerals, give him a single vitamin-mineral supplement balanced to complement his hay.

When horses are stalled and fed intermittently, risks of colic and gastric ulcers begin to rise.

When good hay isn't available (or if your old horse has trouble chewing it), turn to substitutes. “Bagged, chopped hay is expensive but good,” Dr. Gonzalez says. “Hay cubes are also good, but be sure to soak them in water before feeding.” (Fed dry, the cubes may contribute to choke, in which a wad of feed blocks the esophagus.) Processed complete feeds that are designed to replace hay are another option. These feeds contain mixtures of grain and forage and generally have more calories per pound than hay.

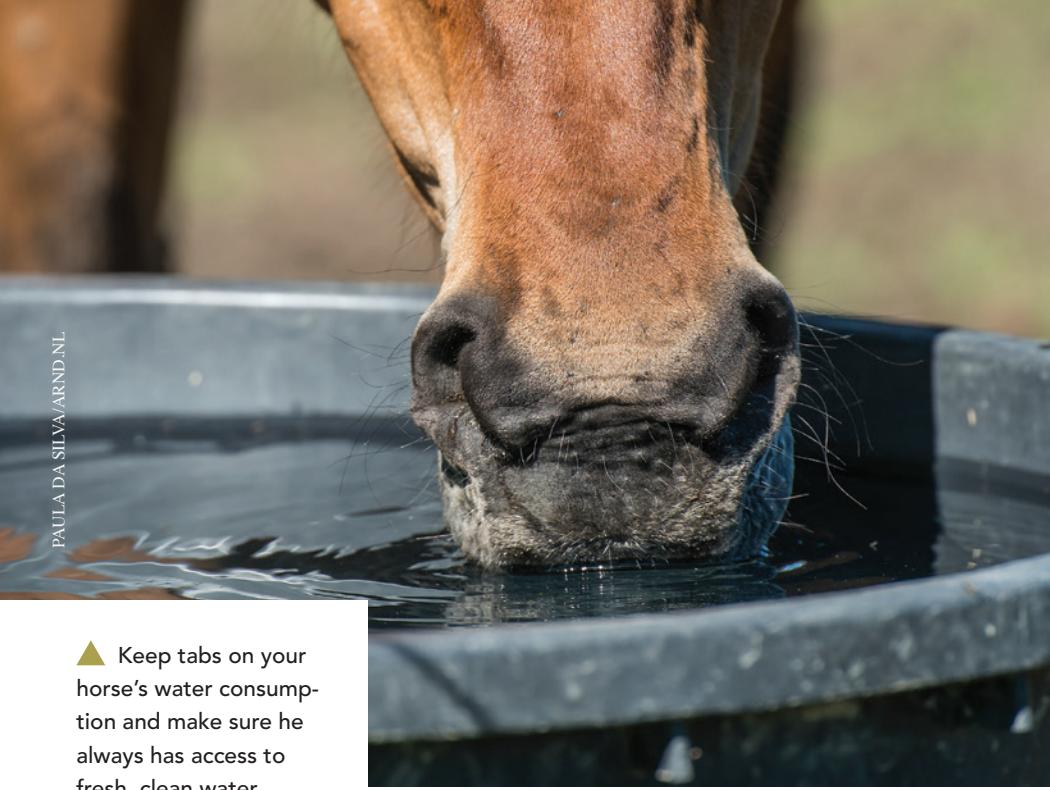
2. FEED CONCENTRATES WISELY

“Show horses, and others with high-energy demands typically need more calories than hay alone provides,”

Dr. Gonzalez says. Grains and processed concentrates are high in carbohydrates and provide lots of energy, but they carry risks. “Large amounts, especially large amounts of grain feeds high in sugars and starch, change gut pH and motility,” she explains. These changes increase the risk of intestinal gas and impaction. Excess carbohydrates are also linked to laminitis.

Follow best practices:

- Pick the right product. Many commercial feeds are formulated to complement different forages and to suit horses at different stages in life. For example, young horses need extra energy, protein and the right balance of minerals for growth; senior horses may develop digestive or metabolic problems that call for changes in diet. Feeds labeled “balanced” provide necessary vitamins and nutrients, so horses getting these feeds generally don't need vitamin-mineral supplements.
- Feed the least amount necessary to meet your horse's nutritional needs, based on his activity level and his age. Measure quantity by weight, not volume.
- Divide grain and processed concentrates high in sugar and starch into several small feedings a day, spaced at least five hours apart. One rule of thumb limits the amount at any single feeding to half a percent of the horse's body weight, and the daily total to one-and-a-half percent.
- Feed fat for extra calories: Fats and oils are rich in calories and don't carry the risks of colic and laminitis that starches and sugars do. Instead of feeding larger amounts of grain if your horse needs more energy, slip some vegetable oil or a commercial high-fat supplement into his feed.



▲ Keep tabs on your horse's water consumption and make sure he always has access to fresh, clean water.

3. FEED CONSISTENTLY

Abrupt changes in your horse's diet—a different concentrate, a new load of hay or sudden access to lush pasture—can trigger loose manure or even colic. Gas production often increases as the microbes in the horse's gut adjust. To avoid problems:

- Make changes in the type or amount of your horse's rations gradually. Mix new hay or feed with old, gradually increasing the proportion of new over five days or so. If you're adding fats or oils, go even slower. Start

Add a little warm water to buckets during cold spells and use heaters in outdoor troughs.

with small amounts (like a quarter cup of oil divided among feedings) and make small increases every few days. If your horse isn't used to pasture, start by letting him graze for a half hour or so and gradually increase the time.

- Choose a quality commercial feed—it's likely to be more consistent in content than a mix from a local mill.
- Don't rush exercise. "During exercise, blood leaves the intestines to provide oxygen where it's needed most—heart, brain, large muscles," Dr. Gonzalez says. "Allowing time after feeding before exercise is generally a good idea, but it can depend on what is fed and what the exercise consists of."

4. MAKE SURE HE DRINKS

"Horses should always have access to water," Dr. Gonzalez says. Dehydration is a major health risk and can lead to impaction colic, not to mention kidney damage and other severe outcomes. To ensure that your horse drinks his fill:

- Provide fresh, clean water at all times. Dump, scrub and refill water buckets daily and top them off through the day. Keep outdoor water troughs filled and clean them at least every

couple of weeks. If you use automatic waterers, clean them regularly and check often to be sure they're working properly.

- Keep tabs on water consumption. An idle 1,100-pound horse typically drinks 6 to 10 gallons of water a day, but factors like heat and exercise levels can increase that amount by 50 percent or more. Diet is a factor, too—pastured horses get moisture from green grass and may drink less than stalled horses.
- Let him drink after exercise. Old beliefs notwithstanding, there's no evidence that it's harmful. And if the horse has lost fluid through sweat, he needs to replace it ASAP.
- Let him drink on the road. "On long trips, stop and offer water every couple of hours," Dr. Gonzalez advises. "Some horses refuse unfamiliar water, so take portable water containers from home." At shows, offer water at least every hour—don't wait until your classes are done and you're back at the trailer.
- Keep him drinking in winter. Many horses seem to prefer room-temperature water—neither warm nor very cold—and may drink less when their water is frigid. Add a little warm water to buckets during cold spells and use heaters in outdoor troughs.

There are more ways to encourage water consumption at times when your horse may not drink enough: Soak hay to sneak some extra moisture into his diet. Provide salt to stimulate thirst, in a salt block or added to his concentrate before going on the road.

"You can disguise the taste of unfamiliar water by adding apple-flavor electrolytes or by adding a bit of sweet feed to his water, but be sure to provide a bucket of plain water alongside," Dr. Gonzalez says. "Experiment at home



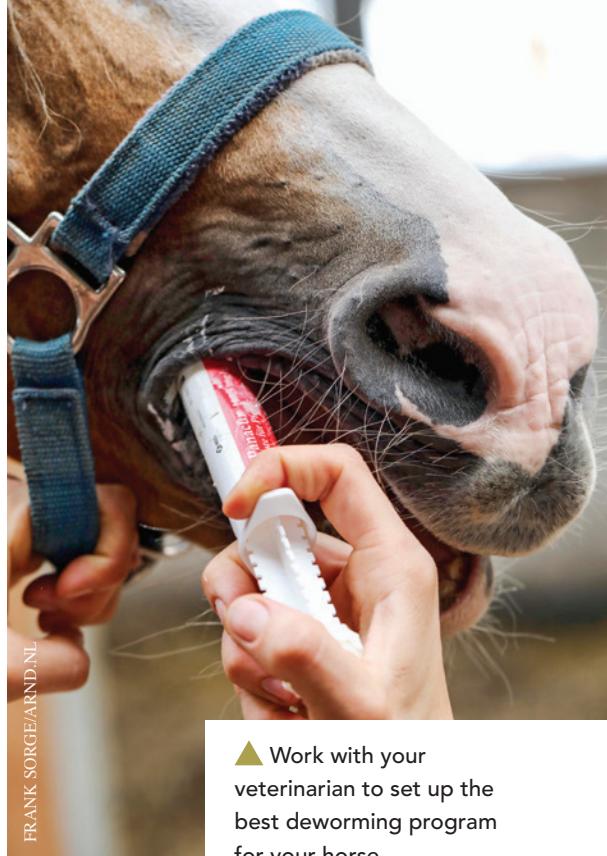
▲ Since horses are herd animals, they benefit from being turned out with other horses.

with these solutions—don't wait until you go to see what he will accept."

5. TURN HIM OUT

Stabled horses colic more often than horses who spend most of their time outside, research shows. They're more likely to develop gastric ulcers, too. Moving around at liberty mimics the horse's natural lifestyle and stimulates gut activity. "My horses are not stalled, which is ideal but not possible for everyone. People have to work with what they have," Dr. Gonzalez says. Here's what to do:

- Give your horse as much time out as possible. When turnout is limited, light exercise can also help keep his digestive system in good working order.
- Turn him out with a compatible buddy (or buddies) if you can. Horses are herd animals, and lack of contact with others can be stressful for them.
- Patrol paddocks and pastures for poisonous plants and debris your horse could accidentally ingest. Check for signs of chewing on fences or other objects. Some horses develop enteroliths, rocklike objects that form when mineral layers build up around a foreign object that ends up in the gut. These stones can grow large enough to block the intestine.
- If the soil is sandy, consider supplementing your horse's diet with psyllium (see "Digestive Supplements" on page 98). Sand ingested as the horse grazes can build up in the intestines, leading to colic. If he's turned out in a sand paddock, put his hay in a feeding rack or a hay net, with a stall mat underneath to catch whatever falls to the ground.



▲ Work with your veterinarian to set up the best deworming program for your horse.

6. FOLLOW BEST PRACTICES

Good stable management provides more ways to ensure gut health:

- Block parasites. Intestinal parasites, including tapeworms and small strongyles, are linked to problems ranging from diarrhea to impaction colic. Work with your veterinarian to set up a deworming program that makes sense for your horse, with annual or biannual fecal egg counts that check effectiveness. "We've moved away from treating all horses on the same schedule because we don't want parasites developing resistance to the deworming medications," something that has already started to happen, Dr. Gonzalez says.
- Call the dentist. If your horse can't chew his feed properly, he's at greater risk for impaction and choke. Moreover, poorly-chewed food may not be fully digested, so he misses out nutritionally. "Every horse should have an annual or biannual dental exam," Dr. Gonzalez says. "Teeth may not need floating but should be checked at least once a year as a preventive, especially as the horse ages and his teeth show more wear."
- Use meds as directed. Antimicrobial drugs can kill beneficial gut bacteria along with microbes that cause disease. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as phenylbutazone and flunixin meglumine (Banamine®) reduce inflammation, but long-term use of NSAIDs has been linked to colic, ulcers and inflammation in the hindgut. These drugs are invaluable, but they should be used only when prescribed by the veterinarian.
- Be watchful. Know your horse's normal behavior patterns and watch him closely to spot subtle changes that may signal the start of GI trouble. You can't always prevent these problems, but prompt treatment can be the key to a happy outcome. 🐾

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ProbioticWise® powder or paste

Your product of choice when a balanced hindgut and robust microbiome are your goals.

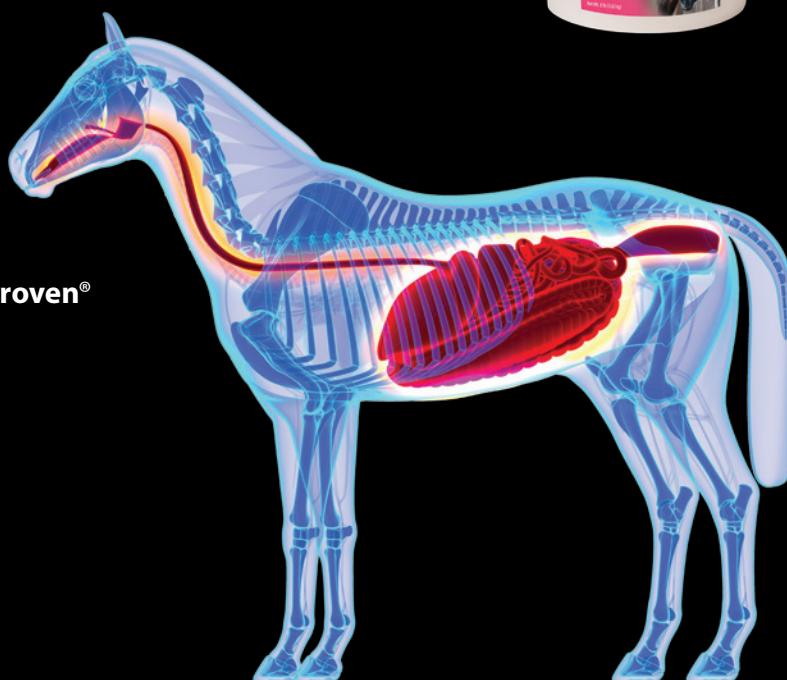
- Captures and sweeps out pathogenic bacteria.
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