

Nutraceuticals: Why Every Pony Clubber Should Read Labels

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What are Nutraceuticals?

Our horses need good quality forage and water to live a healthy life. In an effort to make our horses more productive as riding partners, we add grains (also called concentrates). Anything beyond that is considered a supplement. Some of these supplements have been further divided into a category labeled nutraceuticals.

Donald A. McLean, DVM, tells us: "The AAEP (American Association of Equine Practitioners) defines nutraceuticals as, "Micronutrients, macronutrients, and other nutritional supplements used as therapeutic agents. Communication on the potential risks and benefits from the use of these compounds within the context of a valid veterinarian/client/patient relationship is important. Continued research and education on the use of nutraceuticals in veterinary medicine is advised."

The 2007 Horse Management Rulebook states that nutraceuticals and supplements must be listed on the stall chart and the feed chart (HM 13b). USPC requires this of all competitors in case a vet is needed for your horse. Letting the vet know what the horse is consuming will help in the diagnosis.

Why might nutraceuticals or other supplements be a problem?

Because they might contain herbal or natural products that the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) considers illegal. These ingredients will "affect the performance of a horse and/or pony as a stimulant, depressant, tranquilizer, local anesthetic, psychotropic (mood and/or behavior altering) substance."¹

That's the rule – here's the reason: The goal of competition is to give everyone involved a level playing field; everyone starts the same. If you are an owner or trainer and you give your horse an ingredient that gives your horse an advantage over the other horses, that is unfair to all.

For example, administering something to a mare that keeps her calm while you are at home is fine. These types of nutraceuticals can make a "moody mare" a more pleasurable riding horse and certainly have their place in that setting. Administering an ingredient that keeps that same mare calm at a dressage show gives the rider a distinct

¹United States Equestrian Federation, "USEF Drugs and Medications Guidelines 2006", April 2006, page 4

advantage over other competitors that also might be riding a moody mare; therefore, it is an unfair practice.

How does this affect me?

In the interest of fairness, at all USPC events competitors should enter the competition on a level playing field. To ensure that horses do not gain an unfair advantage, drug testing may be done at regional rallies and/or at USPC Championships. Eventing rallies held in conjunction with a recognized USEA event operate under USEF rules, so all horses on the competition grounds are subject to a random drug test. Veterinarians or vet technicians will accompany a rider/horse from the finish line and obtain a urine sample. If you have given your horse any ingredient that is on the USEF Forbidden Substance List, those substances will show up in your horse's urine and will make him 'test positive'.

If your horse tests positive, you will be disqualified from the event. Even if you have won! You also may be subject to a hefty monetary fine or you could be banned from competing in other USEF sanctioned events for a specific amount of time.

Uh oh... how do I know if there are any banned substances in the supplements I am giving my horse?

There are several things you need to do.

1) Go to <http://www.usef.org> and click on 'Drugs and Medications.' There is a link on that page to 'Drugs and Medication Guidelines,' a PDF file that you can download and print. The list of Forbidden Substances is very clearly presented on page 2. However, check back regularly to see if the list has been updated – additional illegal substances are added frequently.

2) Read the list of Forbidden Substances. A section on pages 4-5 talks about herbal and natural products.

Examples of forbidden substances:

Caffeine	Kava Kava
Camphor	Lavender
Chamomile	Lemon balm
Comfrey	Passion Flower
Devil's Claw	Red Poppy
Hops	Valerian Root

3) Closely read the ingredient label on any supplements/nutraceuticals you are currently giving or plan to give your horse. See if you can identify any forbidden substances in the product.

4) Contact your veterinarian and talk with him/her about the supplements/nutraceuticals you are currently feeding or are thinking about feeding.

Make sure that you discuss:

- The difference between competition management and everyday horse management
- Possible side effects from combining supplements/nutraceuticals
- How will this product affect your horses behavior?
- Is this product suitable?
- If you plan to use the product for every day use or specifically for competition use

If your vet does not have a copy of the product brochure, print one out for him/her. Your vet will be able to tell you if a product has amphetamines or barbiturates or other ingredients that you can't spell or pronounce.

So does this mean I can't EVER give my horse a product that contains any of these ingredients?

No, it means that you must stop using them a number of days before they will be in competition (sometimes up to seven days). Your veterinarian can help you determine how long it takes them to leave your horse's system.

What if I'm not sure about a product or its ingredients?

The USEF has a 24-hour hotline you can call and ask: (800) 633-2472. They are very nice and will talk with you about your specific product.

Please also keep in mind that a "Vet Letter" will not permit your horse to compete if there is a forbidden substance in the product. We strongly advise you to work with your veterinarian when it comes to any type of supplement or nutraceutical product. Numerous products on the market are labeled "organic or natural." Please be aware that some of these products do contain ingredients that are specifically forbidden in competition. You also want to be aware of how two different products work when used together.

Working with your veterinarian can keep your horse happy, healthy and productive for many years.