

FOREGUT OR HINDGUT? THAT'S THE QUESTION

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SMARTPAK™

Knowing what sort of digestive tract support your horse may need can be tough, but providing the right support can also make a big difference. There is a lot of known confusion between your horse's foregut health and hindgut health. After all, the process of breaking down food and absorbing nutrients is all technically “digestion,” so isn't it all the same? Not quite. The organs in the foregut and hindgut have very different functions, and each area has unique health concerns.

An unhealthy stomach is at risk for gastric ulcers, while an unhealthy hindgut is at risk for colic and other digestive upset. As if all that's not complicated enough, colic is not only the primary problem in the hindgut, it's also a general term for abdominal pain, which means mild, recurrent colic can also be a sign of gastric ulcers. However, for the purposes of this article, when we say colic, we're referring to problems (gas, impaction, twists, etc.) in the organs that make up the hindgut.

GASTRIC HEALTH

The word “gastric” means “of or pertaining to the stomach,” so gastric health focuses entirely on one organ—the stomach. While your horse's stomach is relatively small, accounting for less than 10% of his total digestive capacity, it can cause some pretty big problems, including gastric ulcers.

Over 60% of performance horses suffer from gastric ulcers, a painful condition that can cause decreased performance, weight loss, and more. Luckily, there are clinically tested and proven ways you can treat and prevent ulcers and maintain overall gastric health.

You might be wondering what causes gastric ulcers? In their natural state, horses spend about 17 hours per day roaming and grazing on a variety of forages, which means their stomach is

almost never empty. However, modern horse keeping makes that tough to achieve. Often, a horse's diet is composed of infrequent meals of hay and grain, with most of the day spent with an empty stomach. This leaves your horse's sensitive stomach lining exposed to harsh gastric acids, which can cause gastric ulcers. Add to the mix that stress from training, travel, competition, and more can also contribute to ulcers, and you've got a recipe for an unhappy stomach.

The only way to accurately diagnose an ulcer is with an endoscopic exam performed by your veterinarian. However, there are some warning signs that you can watch out for, including:

- Reluctance to eat or drink
- Worsening attitude
- Less-than-optimal performance
- Dull hair coat
- Weight loss
- Agitation at feeding time
- Mild, recurrent abdominal pain

If your horse has been diagnosed with gastric ulcers, you should work with your veterinarian to develop a treatment plan that's best for your horse.

If your horse doesn't have an ulcer, or he has already completed treatment, your main goal should be maintaining stomach health. A good gastric health maintenance plan includes a combination of diet and management changes, along with support from an appropriate supplement.

Focus on hay and other forage, ideally allowing your horse pasture grazing or free choice access to hay all day. Large grain meals have been identified as a proven risk factor for gastric ulcers, so you should only add the minimum amount of grain your horse needs to maintain weight and performance (which may be no grain at all), and aim to feed multiple small meals throughout the day.

There are other management changes you can make to help reduce your horse's risk, including:

- Increasing turnout time
- Limiting the use of NSAIDs (such as bute)
- Making any changes to workload or routine as gradually as possible

HINDGUT HEALTH

Now that we've covered the stomach, what's next? Technically, the small intestine is the next organ in your horse's GI tract, as it is the second portion of the foregut. However, since this article focuses on the two main "problem" areas, we're going to move on to the hindgut—what it does, what can go wrong, and how you can help keep your horse healthy.

In horses, the term "hindgut" refers to the section of the GI tract containing the cecum, large colon, small colon, and rectum. The hindgut is responsible for digesting the complex or structural carbohydrates your horse eats, including all of his forage (hay, pasture, etc.). Since at least 60% of your horse's diet should be made up of forage, there's obviously a lot of work to be done!

If your horse's hindgut isn't functioning properly, it can cause a variety of problems. Excess gas, impaction, and loose stool can all result from hindgut upset or malfunction. Even more concerning, digestive upset can lead to colic, which can be fatal.

Colic is a general, catchall term used to refer to any sort of abdominal pain in horses (in layman's terms, it's a belly ache). While some cases may be so mild that you don't even notice, a severe case of colic is a medical emergency. In fact, colic is responsible for more deaths in horses than any other condition.

The best thing you can do for your horse is get educated about colic. There are several proven factors that increase your horse's risk of developing colic. Knowing these risk factors can help you make smart management and dietary changes. Additionally, learning the warning signs of colic can help you catch an episode early on, improving your horse's chances of recovery. Last but not least, there are several supplement ingredients which have been clinically studied for their effect on digestive health.

BE PROACTIVE ABOUT DIGESTIVE HEALTH

Many of the risk factors that can lead to occasional gastric upset can also put your horse at risk for hindgut problems. Providing daily support is a great way to help your horse cope with this digestive stress. SmartGI® Ultra Pellets provide comprehensive support for the entire digestive tract, from stomach to hindgut. The clinically researched gastric ingredients help maintain stomach health in horses under stress, while yeast, prebiotics, and enzymes provide hindgut support.

SmartGI Ultra Pellets are ideal for horses under stress from training, competing, or traveling or those prone to digestive disturbances. Best of all, SmartGI Ultra Pellets are backed by ColiCare, SmartPak's free \$7,500 colic surgery reimbursement program.

NRHA Professionals like Tim McQuay trust the ingredients found in SmartGI Ultra to help keep their horses feeling their best and performing strong. "I ask for a lot from my horses, from training to competition,

and I also know that keeping my horses' digestive system healthy is the first line of defense to help keep them performing at their very best," says McQuay, an NRHA Hall of Famer and Three Million Dollar Rider. "Because of the combination of clinically studied ingredients found in SmartGI Ultra, I can rest easy knowing that it is really helping cover the entire digestive tract."

Whether you have a hard-working futurity horse or enjoying your horse for a leisurely trail ride, SmartGI Ultra Pellets are a great choice to get the comprehensive support your horse deserves.

From the feed room to the tack room, NRHA Corporate Partner SmartPak offers innovative solutions to help riders take great care of their horses. SmartPak was founded in 1999 with the introduction of the patented SmartPak supplement feeding system. The revolutionary, daily dose SmartPaks are custom-made for your horse, individually labeled and sealed for freshness. With the success of this simple and convenient feeding system, SmartPak has continued to expand its offering of quality products, including its own line of more than 60 supplement formulas called SmartSupplements, and a wide variety of tack, equipment, and supplies. To see SmartPak's full inventory of products for you and your horse, and get free shipping both ways, visit SmartPak.com today. ♦

