

# Breakthrough treatment for hurting horses

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Osteoarthritis is a common problem in racing and other performance horses.

A new osteoarthritis drug combination trialled by University of Sydney researchers could significantly extend the working life of racing and other performance horses and could potentially benefit humans.

Various medications have been assessed for the treatment of [osteoarthritis](#) in horses, but this is one of the first studies to show a new drug combination has the ability to slow down damage to joints, rather than just alleviate pain.

"Osteoarthritis is a major cause of wastage in athletic horses, with a significant economic impact on the equine industry," said Dr. Toby Koenig, surgery resident at the University of Sydney Veterinary Teaching Hospital, Camden.

Dr. Koenig led the clinical research trial at the hospital's Research and Clinical Training Unit (REaCT) which involved treating osteoarthritis in 16 horses undergoing simulated race training.

"We found a new combination of three commonly used drugs - pentosan polysulphate, [glucosamine](#) and [hyaluronic acid](#) - can reduce the damage experienced during [strenuous exercise](#)," said Dr. Koenig, who will present his results at a conference on the Gold Coast this Friday 1 July.

"Until now the focus has been on minimising pain for horses suffering from osteoarthritis. We think this new [drug combination](#) could have significant impact on the way horses are treated, potentially extending careers of horses in racing, dressage and other competitive events."

Professor Andrew Dart, the Director of REaCT and one of Dr. Koenig's supervisors, said the study is a significant international and multi-institutional investigation, with major implications not just for horses, but for other species.

This study has brought together some of the world's leading researchers into equine osteoarthritis, here and in the United States, to produce a significant research outcome which will impact on the welfare of [horses](#) and potentially more widely."

The co-supervisor of the project is Professor Leo Jeffcott, former Dean of the University of Sydney's Faculty of Veterinary Science and official equestrian veterinarian at the previous five Olympics.

Associate Professor Chris Little, Director of the Raymond Purves Bone and Joint Research Laboratory at Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital, worked with the investigators to analyse the combination's impact on the horses' joints.

The Australian team also collaborated with Professor Wayne McIlwraith, Director of the Orthopaedic Research Centre at Colorado State University and regarded as the preeminent expert in equine joint disease and surgery.

The research will also be presented at the American College of Veterinary Surgery's symposium in Chicago later this year.

Provided by University of Sydney

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