

New research questions the use of nutritional supplements in dressage and eventing horses

March 1 2016



In a new study published today in the journal, *Veterinary Record Open*, researchers from the University of Surrey and University of Nottingham have found that owners of dressage and eventing horses in Britain are typically feeding two nutritional supplements per day to their top-performing mounts.

However, the findings from the study revealed that owners' opinions of health and performance issues within their competitive disciplines and their horses did not necessarily mirror the supplements they were using, meaning that they may be early adapters of using nutrition as a preventative measure against the inevitable joint damage associated with performance.

The team examined the responses to an online questionnaire from 599 horse owners, and found that:

Owners of dressage horses identified behavioural issues and energy levels were the most frequently cited problems, followed by lameness, then back and muscle problems. However, their main reason for feeding supplements was for 'joints and mobility' problems.

Owners of eventing horses on the other hand identified stamina and fitness as the main issue, followed by lameness and behavioural issues and energy levels were the third most identified health and performance issue. However, again, their main reason for feeding supplements was for 'joints and mobility' problems.

"There are several possible reasons for the discrepancy between owners' opinions of main problems and their reasons for using supplements," said Dr Teresa Hollands from the University of Surrey.

"Possible factors include the limited number of scientific studies on [behavioural issues](#) in horses and limited evidence on the effectiveness of behavioural supplements". In contrast, there are considerably more studies on the use of supplements to enhance joint function and mobility, and this may explain why owners consider these supplements to be important to use in their horse," added Professor Sarah Freeman from the University of Nottingham.

The results of the study will help improve the understanding of the key health and performance issues in event and dressage [horses](#) and provide an information legacy for all horse owners and riders.

More information: C. Agar et al. The use of nutritional supplements in dressage and eventing horses, *Veterinary Record Open* (2016). [DOI: 10.1136/vetreco-2015-000154](#)

Provided by University of Surrey

Citation: New research questions the use of nutritional supplements in dressage and eventing horses (2016, March 1) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-03-nutritional-supplements-dressage-eventing-horses.html>

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