

THE INS AND OUTS OF OILS FOR HORSES

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Choose your oil carefully. Not all oils are made equal, many have different origins, storage methods and processes that can change their composition entirely to make them go from a beneficial oil to not helpful at all.

Why do people feed oils?

There are many reasons people decide to feed oils to their horse. It can be a good energy source for horses who tend to get too hot from being fed grains, or horses that tend to carry too much weight and feeding more feed is not an option. Some people may feed it for the effect it has on coat shine. Others may be more interested in the anti-inflammatory and antioxidant action of the omega 3s. Whichever your reason for feeding oils this guide goes through the ins and outs of what sets apart a good oil from a bad.

Origin

Let's begin by recognising the type of oil, is it sunflower? Rice-bran? Emu oil or cod liver oil? To the average person this may just seem the same each provide fat right? They certainly do, however we seem to forget that horses are herbivores. The vegan of the animal kingdom if you will. Animal based products are foreign to their digestive systems and therefore not appropriate to feed to the horse, steer clear of any cod liver, emu oil and fish oils just to name a few. Some of these oils are high in omega 3s which is highly sought out to boost numbers on the nutritional panel. However, they may not be ideal internally for your best friend.

Plant-based oils are the way to go with horses as they are herbivores. Herbivores digestive systems recognise and process plant material, animal derived ingredients are technically foreign substances to them and become difficult for their bodies to recognise. There are several plant-based oils which have high omega 3 contents if this is what you're after.

Composition

What type of fats are in the oil you're choosing? Unsaturated fats are fats which are liquid at room temperature, which means oils! Within this category we have monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. Poly-unsaturated fats are home to the omegas, omega 3, 6 and 9. We don't usually hear about omega 9, this is because there is only a small need for this fat in the horse and more importantly it is created by the horses' body.

Omega 3s and 6s on the other hand are widely talked about in the equine community. Omega 6 being responsible for the inflammatory

Trans fats are another common type of fat which is often discouraged from feeding. We will discuss more about this in the next section.

Processing & Farming

Where is your oil grown? Is it imported or made in Australia? Not only is this important to support the Australian economy, but also may help your horses health. Pesticides, chemicals, heavy metals and toxins see fat as a place to call their home. Therefore, when purchasing an oil for your horse it is ideal to source Australian made or oils imported from Europe.

Australia and some countries throughout Europe have stringent laws to prevent the use of some chemical compounds which may be a risk to health. In addition, sourcing organically grown oils is also a great idea to make sure we are not unintentionally feeding our horses a cocktail of chemicals along with their daily oil supplement.

The next thing to look out for is processing methods. How is the oil extracted? It is quite simple, usually oils are extracted using a method of heating the product to separate the oil from the rest of the material. Heat processes are efficient, however they can degrade the nutrients of the oil and depending on the temperature they can denature the oil and create trans fats which are not nutritionally beneficial. Cold pressing of oils is basically what the name suggests. It is a cold type of extraction which separates the oil from the rest of the plant matter. Although it is a slower process, which may result in a more expensive end product it ensures the oil stays nutritionally sound.

Quantity

When we feed oil we need to be mindful of the quantities we are feeding. Some companies suggest 100ml, 2 cups or 3 glugs a day. But what does all this mean and is it appropriate for your horse as an individual?

When looking at quantities we need to delve a little into our horses' digestive system. Fats are metabolised by the enzyme lipase, which is produced by the pancreas and secreted by the stomach. If our horse has a pancreatic issue, diabetes, etc, then there is potential for the lipase to not be produced as efficiently. Similarly with horses who have gastric ulcers may have reduced amounts of lipase in their stomach and may not be able to break down the same amount of fat that a healthy horse can. These are all considerations that need to be considered when figuring out the quantity that is right for your horse.

EQUINE OIL CHECKLIST

Here is a quick checklist to help you choose the perfect oil for your horse:

- Plant based oil
- Not-genetically modified
- Australian made where possible or if imported certified organic cold pressed
- Organic where possible
- High levels of omega 3
- Cold Pressed

When we think about which oils are best suited for horses, taking into consideration the Omega 3:6 ratio of most plant-based oils, flaxseed and chia seed oils take the top ranking. They are the few oils which are not only plant based but higher in omega 3s than 6s. Making them ideal not only as an energy source but also from a medicinal point of view.

If you have questions, queries or need some direction with how to choose the right oil for your horse, please contact us on (03) 9775 6422 and we will be able to help.

