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### ALOE VERA FOR HORSES

**Aloe Vera is not a new addition to the management of horses and for many years it has been used for topical use to help with ailments such as inflamed or burnt skin. However, recently more and more people are looking towards more natural treatments for common conditions such as gastric ulcers and Aloe Vera has been brought to the forefront for use in these instances. Can it really help and is it safe?**

This article aims to delve a little deeper into Aloe Vera and hopefully answer some of these important questions.

#### **Is Aloe Vera safe to feed?**

Unfortunately, in horses there is very little research into the use of such ingredients and very little has been done on the correct dosage and long-term effects. Dietary or herbal supplement products are expected to be safe, effective, and of appropriate quality. However, the complex chemical nature of such supplements makes it difficult to evaluate their efficacy and safety. Herbal products often exhibit great variability in quality because of some issues including authentication, adulteration and substitution during manufacturing, and factors during growth, harvest, and postharvest processing.

In general, it seems that Aloe Vera gel is as safe for internal use in horses as in humans. However, Aloe Vera does have one component which can be troublesome, laxative anthraquinones, which have been shown to cause diarrhoea.

It's hard to know if an Aloe Vera brand contains this as, laxative anthraquinones, aren't declared on the label. If a horse is being fed Aloe Vera according to body mass, then it may be that a problem with diarrhoea is seen. Generally, however, the dosage given is rarely in proper ratio to body mass, so the quantity that is fed rarely causes droppings to become loose. But that brings about the question that if the dosage is not correct, will it have the correct affect?

#### **Aloe Vera and the treatment of Gastric Ulcers**

The equine industry is frequently in a position of not having a great deal of information about treating horses, so many things are done with limited evidence and extrapolating from other areas of medicine. This limited information led a research team from the University of Adelaide in South Australia to assess the effect of Aloe Vera on protecting the sensitive lining of the stomach.

"The inner leaf gel of the Aloe Vera plant has been reported to be effective in the prevention and treatment of gastric ulcers in man

and in animals in experimental models. Its anti-ulcer properties have been attributed to a variety of possible mechanisms, including anti-oxidant activity, anti-inflammatory properties, cytoprotective and mucus-stimulatory effects, and its ability to regulate gastric acid production," explained the team.

Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome (EGUS), includes ulcers affecting both the squamous and glandular portions of the stomach. EGUS negatively impacts performance, can be difficult to treat effectively, and often recurs frequently once treatment has stopped.

To determine whether Aloe Vera was a viable option for horses with EGUS, 39 horses diagnosed with one or more gastric ulcers (grade  $\geq 2$  lesions of the squamous and/or glandular mucosa) were offered either Aloe Vera or Omeprazole. Key findings of the study included:

- Better healing rates were noted in the Omeprazole group; and
- Of the patients diagnosed with squamous ulcers, 56% of horses offered Aloe Vera improved, whereas 85% of horses treated with omeprazole improved.
- The possibility that a higher dose would have resulted in higher rates of improvement could not be ruled out, although the study dose was higher than that commonly given to horses and above that recommended by the manufacturer.

Even though Aloe Vera proved inferior to Omeprazole in the treatment of gastric ulcers, more than half of all horses improved which could indicate that Aloe Vera could be useful in maintaining gastric health and could help to reduce ulcer reoccurrence after treatment with Omeprazole. However, this situational usage has not been studied and therefore using Aloe Vera for EGUS still warrants further study.

### Conclusion

As with any herbal supplement care should be taken as long-term effects, correct dosage rate and impact on nutritional profiles within the body have generally not been studied in the horse. Treating EGUS effectively requires scoping, veterinary treatment and on-going alterations to management, diet and stress levels to ensure that the root cause is treated and not just the symptoms.

*\*Bush, J., R. van den Boom, S.H. Franklin. Comparison of aloe vera and omeprazole for treatment of equine gastric ulcer syndrome. Equine Veterinary Journal. In press.*  
<https://thehorse.com/19987/aloe-vera-for-equine-ulcers/>

## TESTIMONIALS

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