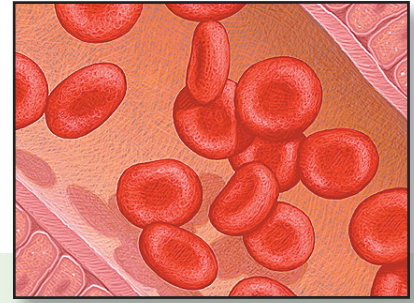


## Is Your Horse Anemic?

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**For years, many veterinarians have noted low levels of anemia in performance horses.** This condition is extremely common but hardly ever commented upon. Any level of anemia, however, is not natural and may indicate a serious problem for the horse.

Anemia is defined by a lowered level of oxygen-delivering red cells in the blood. Without enough red blood cells, horses may become fatigued and even begin to experience shortness of breath. These symptoms are problematic for any horse, but they are of particular concern for the performance animal.

Without a large body of studies on the subject, veterinarians can only make educated guesses as to the causes of equine anemia. Some potential factors include parasites and bleeding due to ulceration in the digestive tract. In fact, these may be linked: parasites burrow into the lining of the gut and leave holes that may then serve as open doors for bacterial infections that can lead to ulceration.

Good treatments do exist for gastric ulcers (ulcers of the stomach). But it seems that even when gastric ulcers are healed with those drugs, some anemia can persist. This may be due to a second potential site of ulceration: the colon.

Recent research has indicated that about two-thirds of performance horses have colonic ulcers. Colonoscopies cannot be performed on a horse, so this problem has remained hidden for some time. But colonic ulcers could easily explain some persistent, low-grade anemias.

**What can you do?** One option to combat anemia in performance horses may be to address the potential causes—namely parasites and ulcers. There are a number of excellent de-worming products available, but treating equine ulcers can be more complex.

One non-testable, natural possibility for promoting digestive tract health is the humble oat. Oats have some remarkable properties, but unfortunately they aren't very digestible, so you can't get them by simply increasing oat intake. You will need to look for a supplement that provides beneficial oat extracts.

Specifically, oat oil contains polar lipids that line the gut and help to prevent bacterial attacks. Beta glucan (another oat extract) is an immune system stimulator. This effect can also help your horse hold harmful, ulcer-causing bacteria at bay.

Some amino acids, including glutamine and threonine, also support the immune system and therefore may help heal the gut. Specific yeast extracts could also help by supporting beneficial gut bacteria while expelling the bacteria that can harm the horse's digestive tract.

Addressing the potential causes of anemia in the performance horse may help allay the problem. With the proper mix of natural substances, owners may be able to help maintain optimal digestive tract health for their horses.