

NEWSLETTER

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Providing round the clock mental and physical stimulation.

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If you went to the zoo tomorrow, and saw a giraffe or a gazelle standing in a 10X10 box stall, or even a 24X24 pipe corral, would you think that was okay?

What if the only contact this wild animal had with others of its own kind was over a shared fenceline? And instead of foraging 18 hours a day as nature intended, the animal was fed two large meals per day? What if, when it rained, the pen turned into knee deep mud? And if the zookeeper told you the creature was allowed half an hour of turnout, or a regimented exercise program for an hour a day, would that be enough for you to think the animal was living a happy life that met its physical, mental and emotional needs?

While every zoo in the country strives to provide a more natural, more engaging, and more healthful environment for the creatures it keeps, our domestic horses continue to live in box stalls and tiny pipe corrals. Instead of grazing and foraging far and wide for their nourishment, they are delivered what equates to "grass jerky" twice a day, which



Mixer pulls hay from one of our new prototype slow feeders.

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they devour in 2 or 3 hours, and then stand around waiting for the next meal. There is no variety in their diet, because it's too much work to provide the kind of constant variety that will not cause a gastric upset. Their food, which is the high point of their existence except for their daily exercise session, is delivered in the exact same place every day, usually in a feeder which obscures at least part of their vision. Their social interaction with their own kind is limited to a horse on either side over the fence, if that.

These are exceptionally social, curious creatures, with a physiology designed for constant movement and grazing. It's no wonder they become bored, neurotic, food aggressive, suffer ulcers, colic, and develop bad habits like cribbing, weaving and pawing. Even beyond the manmade feeding schedule we impose, which diametrically opposes their nature, we are literally boring them out of their minds.

We don't think twice about doggy daycare to keep our canine companions from being bored or lonely. Are our horses any less deserving?

Your challenge for the new year is to explore creative ways to provide a more stimulating and engaging environment for your horse. Slow feeders, herd life, varied terrain...what else can we do?



Twelve different slow feeders and five places to water in the main pen provide our herd incentive to move around continuously, and provide constant access to food, without overfeeding. Above, Mixer nibbles from a Busy Bag; in the background, you can see Riser foraging in the big pasture.



A bridge leads from the main pen to a large pasture, where the horses can forage and play when we're there to monitor them.

Jiaogulan and Acetyl l-Carnitine

A blessing for horses with metabolic disorders, laminitis, and maybe more!

Thanks to Dr. Eleanor Kellon and the ground-breaking Equine Cushings and Insulin Resistance group, which was recently called “the largest field trial in history”, with 5,000 plus active members, horses with metabolic disorders like Equine Cushings (Pituitary Pars Intermedia Dysfunction, or PPID), Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS), and insulin resistance have a fighting chance at staying healthy and even sound. One of the most devastating complications of these disorders is acute laminitis. Protocols for strictly controlled diet are the first line of defense. But an herb called jiaogulan, and the amino acid derivative acetyl l-carnitine are making a big impact on the comfort and hoof health of many of these horses.

Jiaogulan, or j-herb, is an adaptogenic herb with properties similar to ginseng. Adaptogens are substances which enhance the body’s ability to cope with stress. In so doing, adaptogens can help control cortisol levels. Stress raises cortisol levels, and elevated cortisol causes the body to require more insulin in order to metabolize glucose, causing elevated insulin production. J-herb is also known to have powerful antioxidant effects. In addition, studies in humans have noted jiaogulan’s anti-gastric ulcer effect, as well as an anti-hypoglycemic effect.

But the big benefit for laminitic horses is j-herb’s nitric oxide enhancing properties. Nitric oxide is a vasodilator, which improves circulation in the feet. This not only promotes healing, but alleviates the pain associated with laminitis. Traditional NSAIDs like bute compromise nitric oxide production, and are therefore counterproductive to healing. Interestingly, some of the compounds now in human clinical trials and considered the new class of NSAIDs include a nitric oxide donor to counteract this inhibiting effect.

Dr. Kellon recently published the findings of a jiaogulan field trial:

“The field trial on laminitis in horses and ponies has been completed. Animals included in the results below had all fulfilled the criteria...for proper treatment. Of 118 treated with Jiaogulan, 15 horses/ponies (12.7%) failed to respond, or responded initially only to show deteriorating soundness at a later interval. In 12 of these cases, worsening of the underlying medical condition, inability to trim/shoe the feet to a state that prevented further mechanical damage, or an already severely advanced demineralization of the coffin bone were present. In three animals, the reason for poor response was unknown. 57 horses (48.3%) showed complete return to soundness at a walk within 2 days to 2 weeks of starting Jiaogulan. Some of these went through a period of abscess drainage before becoming sound. Although some of the test animals also started to spontaneously trot or even canter on their own, this was not encouraged because of the potential to damage already weakened areas of the foot. The remaining 46 horses (39%) showed obvious improvement of 1 to 2 lameness grades and were stable or continuing to improve at the end of the follow up. These horses all had pre-existing extensive damage to the feet and would require many months to a year to regrow stable laminar attachments.”

Acetyl l-Carnitine, or AICar, is a compound derived from lysine and methionine, two essential amino acids which have for some time been linked to hoof health, and can be found in some hoof supplements. AICar is proving to be an impressively effective way to control neuropathic/refractory foot pain in chronic laminitis. AICar has also shown promise in controlling insulin resistance. And it has been shown to reduce changes in the brain that result in Cushing’s disease.

If you’re interested in trying jiaogulan or acetyl l-carnitine for your horse, please join the Equine Cushings and Insulin Resistance Group on Yahoo here:

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/EquineCushings/>

...or visit the new ECIR website here:

<http://www.ecirhorse.com>

The Devil is in the Details

Absent minded interactions with your horse can lead to behaviors that may puzzle and frustrate you, until you realize how you created them in the first place.

Unceremoniously dropping the hoof you are holding.

This type of inattention can quickly lead to a horse that will yank his foot back from you, especially if you even minutely alter your position while holding his leg.

At the extreme, he may not even want you to pick it up in the first place. Similar is what happens when you ask for the foot, but are not really prepared to take and support it once it is offered. **BE PREPARED** when you ask; smoothly accept and cradle the offered hoof; when you're done with it, carefully lower it all the way to the ground, and allow the toe to touch the ground, before removing your hand.

Accidentally kicking the horse in the leg, or bumping into his hip as you walk around behind him.

You might not even realize it's happening. But a horse that spins his hip away as you try to walk around behind him might be worried that you're going to walk into his hip, kick him in the cannon bone, or trip over his hocks.

Hitting the tied lead rope inadvertently and jerking the horse's head.

Ducking under the horse's neck to get to the other side is never a good idea. But some horses don't have a problem with it...right up until you manage to walk into the lead rope, and give him a good bump on the nose and poll.

Letting the cinch hit the horse's outside leg when you saddle or unsaddle.

Thwack! Right into the off side cannon bone. Ouch!!!! Want a horse to stand quietly for saddling? Pay close attention to where things are flapping around during the process. He shouldn't be jumpy about the process, but he shouldn't be expected to put up with buckles or other hard pieces thwacking him in sensitive places. Organize your gear and tack your horse up thoughtfully.

Sometimes it's okay, but sometimes it's not.

Today, I don't care if he pulls away a little to nibble on that patch of grass while I talk to my friend. A little later today, it's going to really annoy me! How fair is it to expect the horse to understand your inconsistency?

All of these, and similar slip ups, can quickly set up behaviors that will leave you scratching your head. The lesson here is, once again, how your focus and consistency are the keys to a well-behaved, safe and manageable horse. It's also a valuable lesson in how much more tuned in your horse probably is at any given moment than you are.

Good horsemanship is one of the most spiritual and Zen-like endeavors one can engage in. It is the ultimate combination of mindfulness and meditation. When it is done well, the resulting partnership is effortless.

Applying a Sterile Hoof Bandage

Heaven forbid you should ever need to, but some hoof injuries, including puncture wounds, laminitic horses with sole penetration, horses who have had an abscess dug out by the vet (which I vehemently oppose, by the way), wire cuts and the like require meticulous bandaging to properly protect the horse from secondary infection. Here is a step by step guide on the materials you will need, as well as how to properly apply the bandage:

<http://thoughtfulhorseman.com/BarefootHoofCare/Bandaging/applyingasterilebandage.htm>



Special thanks to my good friend, Maren Thompson, RN, BSN, CNOR, RNFA, for demonstrating the process, and Big Bad Leroy Brown, TWHBEA, RHBA, SSHBEA, NSSHA for being such a patient (and handsome) model.

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About Maria Siebrand

& The Thoughtful Horseman...

With a background in the life science and pharma industries, and a determination to make life better for our domestic horses, Maria brings a science-based approach to horsekeeping, equine nutrition, and the field of barefoot hoof care. She offers barefoot hoof care services, nutrition consultations and diet formulation, and horsemanship coaching, as well as a line of supplements formulated to fit the typical Southern California equine diet.

Maria is available for clinics, lectures, and mentorships on barefoot hoof care and progressive horsekeeping practices.



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