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FLAX, CHIA, OR FISH OIL -- WHICH IS BEST FOR OMEGA 3S?

Omega 3 fatty acids keep your horse healthy in a variety of ways. They balance immune function, protect joints and ligaments, diminish airway inflammation, support gastrointestinal function, reduce skin allergies, and decrease nervousness. Fresh grass has ample omega 3s -- four times more than omega 6s. Hay, however, has virtually none left. And commercial feeds usually contain soybean or corn oils, which are very high in inflammatory omega 6s. While there's one omega 6 that is necessary -- linoleic acid -- too much of a good thing can create an imbalance.

To provide omega 3s, horse owners generally turn to one of three sources -- flaxseeds, chia seeds, or fish oils. Keep in mind that there are several fatty acids that can be classified as "omega 3" based on their chemical structure, but there is only one omega 3 fatty acid that your horse cannot produce on his own, and therefore, must be in the diet: Alpha Linolenic Acid (ALA). The fat found in flaxseeds (oil or ground into a meal) and chia seeds is predominantly in the form of ALA; flax provides approximately 4:1 omega 3s to omega 6s, while chia has slightly fewer omega 3s.

Fish oils are high in two omega 3 fatty acids: docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). Though horses are not fish-eaters, both of these fatty acids offer strong anti-inflammatory benefits and may be useful for heavily exercised muscles and joints. ***But, fish oil does not provide the essential ALA.*** Horses need ALA in their diets because their bodies are unable to manufacture it. They

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can, however, create DHA and EPA from ALA. Therefore, supplementing the diet with flax or chia will better mimic the omega 3s found in plants -- what horses are designed to eat.

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