

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

The following are page extracts from a 32 page booklet by BAHNM, available at £3.60 + P&P – contact: info@bahnm.org.uk for more details.

**The Holistic Management of
Intestinal Parasites in
Horses.**

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Introduction

Modern pharmaceutical wormers are becoming less effective in controlling intestinal parasites. The main reason for this is that they quickly become resistant to the chemicals used. In an attempt to increase effectiveness, horse owners and veterinary surgeons are being encouraged to increase the use of synthetic wormers, but they are rightly wary of this as they can damage the immune system in some circumstances. It is clear that the current methods of control are not sustainable and it seems unlikely that novel chemical compounds will be developed to try and counteract the problem.

This problem is not unique to horses, it applies to all domesticated grazing animals, and new methods of prevention and control are being sought. One such method is properly integrated or holistic management systems, which take into account the whole picture, rather than simply concentrating on killing the parasites. In these systems pharmaceutical wormers are used only when absolutely necessary and in some situations they need not be used at all. Their use in this way maintains the efficacy of the drug because the worms are not as resistant and the unwanted side effects of the drug in the horse are kept to a minimum.

Signs of potentially problematic worm infestation can often be observed early and appropriate steps can then be taken. These can include ill-thrift, swollen belly, weight loss, anemia, coughing and diarrhea, but the alert owner will usually spot the first signs before these symptoms are seen, very often it may be just a sense that the horse is not happy. Regular egg counts should form part of the regime, especially if the owner is inexperienced and when the picture is being established during conversion to integrated methods of control. When the balance has been established worm counts can be less frequent.

It is perfectly possible to control intestinal parasites in horses without the use of synthetic pharmaceutical preparations. Such methods were in common use until the 1940's when more emphasis was put on prevention of problems through good husbandry, an art which has been largely ignored in recent times. Good husbandry relied on accumulated knowledge of the species and its natural environment, as well as its requirements for food, housing and handling. Good husbandry meant good health.

That is not to say that wormers were not used in former times, they certainly were. But the use of the potent herbal wormers, such as male fern (*Dryopteris felix mas*) was reserved for when the infestation warranted more drastic measures. This was usually undertaken by a professional because as with most heroic herbal medical measures of the day, the therapeutic dose was very close to the toxic level for the animal. In addition, chemical compounds in plants are generally unstable, which required the physician to prepare his own medicine from scratch. More commonly, regular use of the milder anthelmintic herbs in the feed was successful in preventing the problem, a practice which mirrored the principle of self medication in the undomesticated species.

The information given in this booklet is intended to help horse owners design a strategy to control intestinal parasites through holistic management. This places strong emphasis on prevention, including the use of optimum nutrition and the use of mild but effective herbal anthelmintics in order to replicate the principle of natural feeding and self medication. This should prove attractive to owners wishing to reduce the frequency of dosing with pharmaceutical products because they are concerned about their long term efficacy and side effects.

Where the conditions are optimum, holistic methods can be used instead of conventional pharmaceutical wormers. It is recognised though that, often, because of the constraints of modern management systems, this may not be possible. It may be that the best that can be hoped for is that the need for pharmaceutical wormers can be reduced rather than removing them altogether.

Some of the substances referred to here are highly toxic and legally restricted to professional use. Under no circumstances should these be used without professional guidance. The BAHNM can accept no responsibility for problems occurring through misuse of any information given here. Veterinary assistance should always be sought if an animal is in any pain or distress.

The Holistic Management of Intestinal Parasites in Horses

An integrated approach to the control of intestinal parasites without the routine use of pharmaceutical wormers.

It is perfectly possible to control intestinal parasites in horses without the use of pharmaceutical wormers. This booklet provides practical advice for the horse owner wishing to introduce alternative methods of control because they are concerned about the long term efficacy and side effects of chemical anthelmintics. A major focus is on the effects of various herbal species on gastro-intestinal nematode parasites when used in conjunction with optimum nutrition and integrated systems of management. It is an overview of the subject distilled from an academic research programme using qualitative and quantitative research methodology involving non-invasive laboratory and field studies conducted at the Universities of Exeter and Portsmouth.

This booklet is part of a series about holistic animal management produced by The British Association of Holistic Nutrition and Medicine (BAHNM).



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