



## ***The Importance of Mineral Balance in Equine Behaviour Management – Hamish’s Tale***

I was contacted by a concerned mother for help, over the last 2 month’s her son’s pony, Hamish, had developed the following behaviours:

1. Significant increase in sweat production – in work and when anxious
2. Easily startled, and constantly focused “out there” and “spooking at everything”
3. Appeared fearful of unknown horses. But over dependant on seeing the horses in the neighbouring paddock.
4. Constantly calling for attention, and refusing to leave the corner of the paddock where he was closest to the other horses
5. No longer happily greeting his rider at the gate
6. Impatient type behaviour eg Pawing
7. Rearing and bucking, which seemed fearful
8. Muscle pain
9. Increased aggression to other horses in the same paddock

Prior to this Hamish carried his rider happily and calmly and I am told that if “horses could purr to show their pleasure in jumping, Hamish would have”.

To address the problems they were having, Hamish’s owner gained the services of a horse riding instructor to rule out rider influence, but it was found that Hamish was even more anxious with the riding instructor on board.

### ***So why was Hamish anxious? Pain? Fear?***

A chiro/muscle therapist was asked to assess Hamish and suggested MSM powder for the muscle pain.....

### ***But why did Hamish have muscle pain?***

It was also decided to add “a salt mixture” to the feed to overcome the sweating and replace lost salts, with no appreciable affect.

### ***But why was Hamish sweating?***

Let’s take a quick look at Hamish’s history. He was broken in as a 4 year old and trained in jumping; he is now 6 years old. When they bought Hamish, Hamish was in poor condition. They wormed him, fed oaten hay, oaten chaff, economix and equibix plus the salt mix to address the sweat loss twice a day, with probiotics and MSM.

Here my warning bells went off. In being kind to Hamish, a large mineral imbalance had been created. The diet provides far more than adequate phosphorous, very little calcium or magnesium.

### ***Deficiency of Calcium results in:***

***Neuro muscular excitability,  
Increased sweating,  
Nervousness,  
Increased respiratory rate  
Muscle twitching, plus  
Musculo-skeletal pain and  
Muscle spasm causing further pain.***

With consideration of the effects of calcium deficiency, Hamish’s anxiety issues, increased sweating, over reaction, and muscle pain may be induced by the current feeding regime. In this case, adding the salt mixture unfortunately had exacerbated Hamish’s issues, as had the MSM. These supplements were not required, further encouraging the body to sweat to remove the excess, which may compound the calcium and magnesium deficiency.

A horse can gain adequate minerals from the feeds; we just have to supply the right feeds! Adding supplements was not what this pony required and was not going to resolve the current issues.

We changed Hamish's diet, by removing the Oaten Hay, and replacing it with Meadow Hay (containing approx 20% clover), we reduced the oaten chaff and added lucerne chaff, removed the pellets and equibix and began to use Barley as the concentrate portion of the diet. As significant signs of deficiency were being displayed, we added a calcium supplement to be included for a couple of months, replaced the "salt mix" with a small amount of iodised salt to provide adequate iodine, sodium and chloride.

Within 3 weeks, I received an email to tell me that Hamish is enjoying his new diet, and the following changes in behaviour have already been noted:

1. No longer worried about the other horses in the neighbouring paddock
2. No longer calling out to other horses
3. No longer over reacting to external happenings – in fact little notice being shown to changes
4. Happily, and calmly greeting his handler at the gate.

Hamish has not been ridden since the change in diet, but given the quick change in attitude on the ground, I feel the owners will have no trouble getting Hamish back to the happy and well-adjusted pony he was. Chatting to the owner a few months later, Hamish continued to be a happy pony.

This tale shows the importance of looking at the whole horse when assessing for problems. The chiro/muscle person was correct, the horse had pain, but why? The riding instructor found the horse to be highly anxious, again but why? A Salt Mixture was added because he was sweating, but why was he sweating? To address a situation effectively the entire presentation is best to be considered rather than simply addressing issues as separate entities. In this case an obvious change as a result of a balanced diet.

***Please for your horse's sake – throw away the attitude of what can I add to the food, who will fix it? Use only practitioners with formal equine education,*** to keep your horse healthy. Balance your diet, and save money by avoiding unnecessary supplementation.

This client's situation is a good lesson for us all. A fabulous outcome for Hamish and his rider, and a great emotional and financial relief for the parents.

***Until next time, take care of your selves and your equine friends.***

***Christine***