

Diet and exercise is important for horses for proper muscle development and conditioning. I often see and treat horses for sore backs and am asked several times about saddle pads, saddle fit and other modalities to alleviate pain. One of the best things to avoid back pain in your horse is to encourage proper back muscles for a strong topline so that they will have their own natural padding. This short article will discuss assessing your horse's topline, the importance of essential amino acids in the diet for muscle development and recovery, and some exercises that can help develop back muscles.

An ideal topline for a horse is a nice flat back. When you place your hand over the back and wither area, you would like to feel the epaxial muscles on the palm of your hand. The epaxial muscles should be well developed and prominent on either side of the vertebral spinous processes. These muscles will help to protect the back vertebrae from the pressure of a saddle and weight of the rider. Check out the following link to learn more about assessing the topline.

Amino Acids are very important for proper muscle development, especially back muscles. There are 21 amino acids that are used to make proteins. A horse can create 12 of the amino acids on its own. The other 9 are considered essential amino acids and must be acquired through their diet. Good quality forage (hay or grass) and grain (fed at the recommended directions) should provide the horse with the essential amino acids. Current research has shown that 3 amino acids, Lysine, Threonine, and Methionine, may be lacking in the correct amounts. There are supplements available to increase the levels of these 3 amino acids. Topline Xtreme and Super Sport are two supplements with added essential amino acids to help muscle development and muscle recovery after workouts.....links to products or more information.

To encourage back muscle development for a strong topline, I recommend a lunging program with a neck stretcher to engage the epaxial muscles. A strong, well developed back will lead to a happier horse that is more flexible and able to perform better. Link to article

Providing good nutrition and a good exercise program are important tools for the overall wellness and performance for our equine companions and athletes. Consult your local feed representative or an equine nutritionist to ensure your equine friend is receiving all the proper nutrition needed.