

The effect of feeding horses exhibiting stereotypical behaviours a commercial calming supplement

Introduction

Stereotypical behaviours are common in horses. The purpose of this study was to determine whether a commercially available equine calmer (ProKalm, Science Supplements Ltd) could abolish or reduce the severity of stereotypical behaviours in horses.

Methods & Materials

Fifteen horses exhibiting stereotypical behaviour on a chronic and continuous basis were recruited to take part in the study. Owners were given a questionnaire and asked to describe the type of stereotypical behaviour and rate the severity on a visual-analogue scale with 0 being no stereotypical behaviour observed to 10 being most severe stereotypical behaviour. The behaviours reported were wind-sucking (n=5), crib-biting (n=4), weaving (n=4), box-walking (n=2). Three horses exhibited 2 different stereotypical behaviours. Owners were asked to score the horses on Day 1 (prior to treatment) and then on Days 2 and 3. All horses received 64g of ProKalm split equally between morning and evening feeds.

Results

All horses ate all treatments. The median behaviour severity score on Day 1 was 7 (range 3 to 10) and reduced to 4 (range 0 to 8) and 2 (range 0 to 8) on Days 2 and 3, respectively. Three horses (who all exhibited wind-sucking with a severity score of 7 or 8/10) showed no reduction in behaviour severity score as reported by their owners. The greatest reduction in behaviour score was with horses showing weaving and crib-biting. Behaviours reduced on both days of treatment.

Conclusion

Feeding 64g of ProKalm for 2 days split between morning and evening feeds to horses with stereotypical behaviours resulted in a significant reduction in median behaviour severity score, as reported by owners. The effect was strongest with horses exhibiting weaving and crib-biting. Further studies using higher doses and for a longer duration are warranted.

