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SALT

ELECTROLYTES

HYDRATION

# Complete Guide to Feeding Electrolytes for Horses or Salt

June 8, 2023

When humidity soars and the mercury in the thermometer reaches epic heights, you know it's time to start chugging electrolytes. Especially if you're out for hours on the trail or in the paddock sweating in the summer heat.

But what about your horse? You're probably important to feed your partner salt. But do horses need electrolytes as well? Are salt and electrolytes the same

How Can I Help?



thing? And if they aren't, do you know which one you should give your horse, and when?

First, we need to understand that salt *is* an electrolyte, but it isn't the only electrolyte horses need. Confused? Let's clear the cloudy waters and discuss when to feed horses electrolytes or salt, what equine electrolytes are, why horses need them, and how to pick the best electrolyte paste for horses.

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## What Are Equine Electrolytes?

Electrolytes are minerals that produce ions with positive or negative electrical charges when dissolved in body fluids. But what do electrolytes do for horses? Electrolytes have been compared to several colloquial things within the body: a steady electrical current keeping the lights burning strong, motor oil that makes the body's engine run smoothly, and... wait for it... crossing guards. Crossing guards? Let's explain.

Balanced electrolytes help the body run without a hitch—like the smooth gait of a Tennessee Walker. They regulate chemical reactions, maintain cell fluid levels, and keep digestion, nerves, and muscles, including the heart, contracting and firing fluidly.

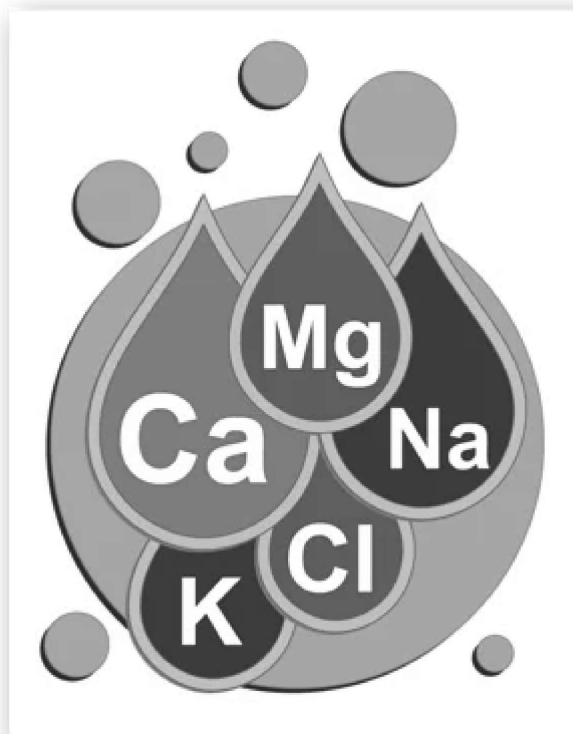
And speaking of fluid, that's what we usually think of when talking electrolytes. Together, water and electrolytes make a great hydration team. As H<sub>2</sub>O enters the body—whether in a human or horse—electrolytes

direct traffic and send the water to places and organs that need it most. Like crossing guards!

In short, **electrolytes** help ensure the water your horse drinks gets to the cells that need it, and that keeps performance and energy levels high. A win for you both!

## ***What Electrolytes Do Horses Need?***

At some point, you've likely spent a long day in the saddle, neglected to drink enough water, and afterward pounded a sports drink to pick up



your energy and ward off a headache. The main electrolytes added to most electrolyte drinks are the same horses need—except in supplements formulated for horses. Necessary equine electrolytes include:

1. Sodium (Na)
2. Chloride (Cl)
3. Potassium (K)
4. Magnesium (Mg)
5. Calcium (Ca)

All five are essential. However, salt, created when sodium and chloride (NaCl) are combined, is required by horses in the greatest quantity, followed by potassium, then magnesium and calcium.

## ***Signs of Electrolyte Imbalance in Horses***

Every horse sweats. Within that sweat are copious amounts of expelled electrolytes. In fact, a horse that's exercised hard can lose up to 4 gallons of sweat per hour, equating to approximately 30 teaspoons of lost body salts. That's a lot of sweat and salt!

But a horse doesn't have to be worked into a lather to lose loads of electrolytes. Any horse that sweats for a prolonged time can deplete these vital minerals to critical levels. The amount of electrolytes your horse may lose through sweat depends on temperature, humidity, workload, and the duration of all three. Electrolytes are also lost through urine and manure—particularly diarrhea, which can drain fluid and minerals in a hurry, causing dehydration.

**Here are symptoms of electrolyte deficiency to watch for in horses:**

- Fatigue
- Poor performance
- Reduced sweating
- Decreased drinking
- Decreased eating
- Muscle tremors
- Tying up

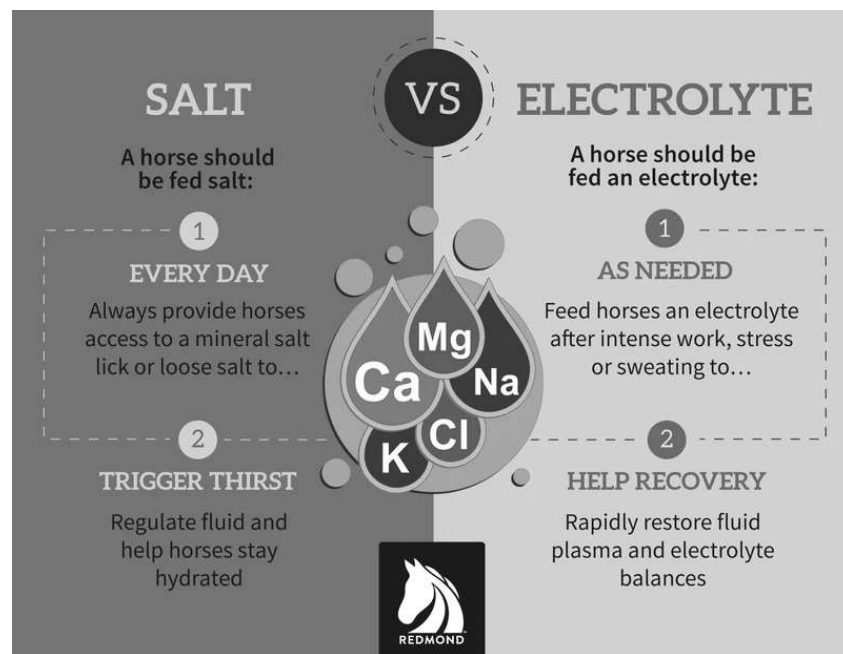
Since electrolytes cannot be stored in the body, any time large amounts are lost, they must be replenished

to help horses rehydrate and recover. This is where you can step in with either a mineral salt, electrolyte, or both.

## When to Give a Horse Electrolytes vs. Salt

Let's say your horse has worked and sweated hard on the trail. Or she's been traveling for two days in mid-July. Or he's simply hanging out in the pasture when the first sweltering spring day hits. Your horse looks a little droopy and you suspect it needs extra fluids and electrolytes. Should you provide salt or a horse electrolyte to replenish minerals and encourage drinking?

Good question. **Horses need salt daily and occasionally an electrolyte supplement.** Each of the situations above would likely warrant both. Let's look more closely at when to feed your horse salt versus an electrolyte, and what each does for horses.



### *Feeding Salt to Horses*

Salt helps trigger the thirst response that tells horses to drink. A horse's brain monitors sodium levels and tells horses to stop drinking when levels are low to avoid flushing more sodium from the body. When sodium levels are normal, horses are more inclined to drink water regularly.

Providing a horse with salt helps sodium levels stay balanced and stimulates a horse to keep drinking. Without it, many horses won't consume enough water and risk dehydration.

In short, salt is a necessary part of a horse's everyday diet and should always be available. You can help your horse receive adequate salt by top-dressing a loose mineral salt on feed and offering a quality free-choice mineral salt lick. Learn more about daily salt intake recommendations for horses and how to avoid rare situations of salt toxicosis.

## ***Feeding Electrolytes to Horses***

As mentioned, electrolytes are essential minerals that play a vital role in fluid retention. They're also involved in nearly every other bodily function. A quality horse electrolyte supplement can replenish those electrolytes and speed up recovery after exercise.

So do you need to feed your horse a supplement every day? Probably not—you can give a horse too many electrolytes. So how often *should* you feed electrolytes to horses?

### **WHEN TO GIVE ELECTROLYTES**

Electrolytes are indicated whenever a horse experiences prolonged or repeated sweating and sometimes in other circumstances. Below, veterinarian Dr. Jessica

Huntington from Stephenville, Texas discusses when to give horses electrolytes.

“We all want our horses to look, feel, and perform their best. We can help them by paying attention to how much and how often they drink, learning what triggers them to stop drinking, and knowing how to combat dehydration. One tool to is to offer a horse electrolyte paste. Here are eight situations horses may need an electrolyte supplement:”

1. **On the road.** Horses are less likely to drink when hauling and experiencing new environments. Feeding an electrolyte paste before and during travel will stimulate the thirst response and help horses stay hydrated on the road.
2. **Pre-performance.** Horses need electrolytes to function at optimum levels. Giving your horse a paste before a performance increases energy levels, ensures muscles are fitter, keeps your horse hydrated under stress—and gives you a better chance at success.
3. **Post-performance.** Competing requires a lot from horses, as they expend concerted amounts of mental focus and physical energy. An electrolyte paste after a performance can help ease stress and speed up recovery time for tired muscles.
4. **Excessive sweating.** Electrolytes aren't stored in the body and need replenishing often. Any time your horse sweats a lot it's losing copious amounts of electrolytes and would benefit from a paste.

5. **Humid conditions.** Keep electrolytes on hand if you live in an area with heat and humidity. Horses are at significant risk for electrolyte imbalance and heat stress in humid weather, and electrolyte supplements can play a significant role in rehydrating.
6. **Weather changes.** Seasonal and extreme weather brings unique challenges for horses; one being a disinclination to drink. An electrolyte paste can help water consumption stay consistent during rapid weather changes and excessive heat or cold.
7. **Horse colic.** If your horse is colicky, it's probably also disinterested in drinking. Administering an electrolyte paste can enhance the thirst mechanisms that get your horse drinking again and help ease painful muscle spasms accompanying colic.
8. **Loose manure.** A horse experiencing an episode of loose stool or diarrhea is in danger of becoming dehydrated. One way to decrease fluid loss, increase water retention and speed up recovery is to give your horse an electrolyte paste."

## HOW TO GIVE ELECTROLYTES

These tips for feeding electrolytes to horses from Iowa State University are also helpful:

- Feed electrolytes according to the amount of work your horse performs.
- Start feeding electrolytes during training, not just on the day of competition.



- Electrolytes make a horse thirsty, so always ensure clean, fresh water is available.
- Always provide a salt lick to allow your horse access to additional salt.
- Never add electrolytes to your horse's only water supply; provide a separate fresh water source.

## What are the Best Electrolytes for Horses?

Now that you know the importance of occasionally offering electrolytes in addition to salt, how do you choose the best supplement? Here are three things to look for when selecting horse electrolytes:

- **High salt content.** Sodium chloride, then potassium, should be the main ingredients.
- **Low sugar content.** Glucose, a simple sugar, helps water and electrolytes absorb but should be present in small amounts.
- **Isotonic to sweat.** Look for a supplement that provides electrolytes in similar concentrations as sweat. A sweat-like solution will rapidly restore fluid and plasma electrolyte imbalance in horses (*PubMed*).

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How Redmond Electrolytes Prepare My Horse



*Barrel racer Autumn Snyder uses Redmond Electrolyte horse paste to keep horses hydrated and performing their best. Watch this two-minute video to see her story.*

## ***Redmond Equine Electrolyte Paste***

Redmond Electrolyte syringe is a fast-acting horse electrolyte paste that rapidly replenishes critical electrolytes and vitamins. It improves energy and performance with natural ingredients you can trust. Our easy-to-use metered syringe contains:

- Sodium, chloride, and potassium as the main ingredients.
- Low sugar content.
- 60+ trace minerals for horses harvested from our Redmond mineral deposit.
- Added vitamins A, B, D, and E for improved health and performance.
- Great peppermint flavor!
- [Click here to see Electrolyte's full mineral analysis and ingredients.](#)

Redmond Electrolyte paste rehydrates and helps your horse stay in peak form. Click below to learn more or try our product today!

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## **Learn More**

- Worried your horse is dehydrated? Check for these 5 symptoms of dehydration.

- Many horses don't get enough salt and minerals from a lick alone. Learn how switching to a loose mineral salt can better meet your horse's needs.

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