



WELLBEING SERIES

FUEL FOR LIFE

IN 2018, IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU! WELCOME TO THE FIRST EDITION OF OUR NEW WELLBEING SERIES WITH **ANDREA OAKES** AND HER FIRST TOPIC IS NUTRITION. WE ALL CLOSELY MONITOR OUR HORSE'S DIET, BUT WHAT ABOUT OURSELVES?

There can't be many of us who don't realise that a horse's diet affects his health, his mood and his performance. So why do riders so often neglect their own nutritional needs, skipping meals and reaching for strong coffee or sugary snacks as a pick-me-up when energy levels slump?

Even if you're not guilty of such blatant food crimes, the chances are that your horse takes priority where nutritional planning is concerned.

According to sports dietician and performance nutritionist Julia Scott Douglas, many riders are missing a trick by paying so little attention to what and when they eat.

"There are two athletes in a dressage partnership," she reasons. "You could argue that if you've got a really good horse, why bother about the rider? But it's all about marginal gains: making small improvements in many areas.

"If you don't eat well, you won't feel 100%," explains Julia, who is also a consultant on the British Equestrian Federation (BEF) World Class Programme. "With the right diet you'll be fitter, stronger and more alert, which will give you an edge both at the yard and in competition. Some people are juggling work and horses, while others are riding four or five times a day and spending long hours teaching. Eating properly will give you the energy you need for a busy lifestyle, as well as boosting your immune system to ward off winter colds and bugs."

So, where's best to begin if you feel that your eating habits could be improved?

"Aim for a healthy balance, with a good mixture of different foods eaten at regular intervals," advises Julia. "This means starting with breakfast, then eating a low-fat, starchy lunch or small snacks throughout the day and a well-proportioned evening meal."

The easiest way to remind yourself of the basics is to divide your overall food intake into three. One third should comprise fruit and vegetables, for bug-busting vitamins and minerals that help prevent illness and promote healing. Carbohydrates should make up another third, to fuel muscles and ward off tiredness, while the final third should include protein for growth and repair and dairy for healthy bones – and perhaps just a few of the more indulgent treats. Fat need not be banished. Non-saturated fats are needed

to maintain cell structure in the brain, so opt for olive and seed oils, nuts and oily fish while cutting back on crisps and processed food such as pastry.

"Don't forget to drink, too," adds Julia. "Our bodies are made up of 50-65% water, which needs to be replenished regularly. Lack of fluid can lead to a reduction in concentration, skills and the ability to make decisions."

Best intentions can soon go by the wayside however, when you're trying beat the clock. How can we put healthy eating high on the agenda?

"If you don't have time for cereal, porridge or toast before an early ride or leaving for work, take a smoothie and a cereal bar with you," suggests Julia.

"Cold pasta salad, soup or oatcakes with cheese make a good lunch on the go, while dinner could be as simple as baked beans and scrambled eggs on toast or some stir-fried vegetables with ready-to-wok noodles.

"It's important, too, to re-fuel," she adds. "You need energy to train, to ride out and to compete. Eat a source of carbohydrate up to an hour before you train and within 30 minutes to an hour of finishing, to restore your body's energy stores and to prepare for the next bout of activity. Milk is a great post-training

option, as it rehydrates and contains carbohydrates as well as whey protein for muscle repair.

"Starchy snacks are another good choice, perhaps malt loaf or muffins, or plain biscuits and cakes such as fig rolls and flapjacks," says Julia. "Fruit, fresh or dried, is ideal. Sugary foods such as jelly beans will also give you energy-giving carbs, but will provide little else in the way of nutrients and are easily over-eaten."

Planning ahead can make a big difference to performance. If you're running on empty, don't be surprised if your reactions and motivation levels are below par.

"Think about your competition timings and plan around them," says Julia. "Try not to skip a meal because of a test, or forget that you'll need energy to compete again the next day. If you're too

nervous to eat, remember to drink, at least, and nibble on high-energy snacks if you can."

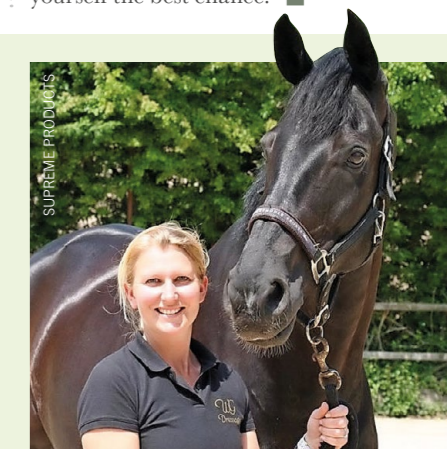
Eating to win means packing the lorry with food and drink well ahead of time, in case any last-minute disasters distract you. Keep plenty of healthy tuck in the truck to avoid grabbing a king-size chocolate bar when you stop at the

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DRESSAGE RIDER HAYLEY WATSON-GREAVES WAS FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO EAT ON THE GO...

"The horses take priority so I would forget to eat and miss out on meals," she says. "I then sat down to a massive dinner at the end of the day. It wasn't good for my energy levels or for keeping focused." With advice from the BEF World Class Programme, Hayley's habits are back on track. "I'm now eating more fruit and veg along with carbs and plenty of good fats," she explains. "I never used to eat breakfast as I wasn't hungry, but I take porridge pots with me to a show and simply add boiling water. Being well hydrated and having the right amount of food in my system has really boosted my energy and improved how I feel.

"It has taken time to implement changes properly, however, and I don't go over the top with it," adds Hayley. "I still enjoy the occasional treat – especially my mum's homemade cakes."



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