

SWEATING, ELECTROLYTES AND HYDRATION

Key points:

Horses can lose 2 to 3 gallons of water and approximately 10% of extracellular sodium and chloride per hour of work in hot environments.

They can become 4-5% dehydrated in an hour of exercise.

Most horses worked daily in the summer will not take in enough salt from food or a salt block to replenish losses and may need a source of loose salt or have 1-2 ounces added to their feed. Plenty of potassium is usually present in the feed.

Horse sweat is higher in sodium, chloride and potassium than is plasma (blood). Since thirst is at least partially triggered by increased concentration of these ions in the blood, and in horses, these ions decrease in concentration with sweating, horses often do not drink enough to stay hydrated when sweating on a regular basis.

In hot, dry and especially breezy conditions, the sweat will dry almost as it is formed so little sign is left of how much fluid and electrolytes have been lost (except for some salt crusting on the hair. To cool horses efficiently, hose the whole horse with cold water, scrape it off and reapply until the water stays fairly cool on the horse.