



## The Best Sources for Omega 3 Fatty Acids

by Dr. Juliet Getty

Omega 3 fatty acids keep your horse healthy in a variety of ways. They balance immune function, protect joints and ligaments, diminish airway inflammation, support gastrointestinal function, reduce skin allergies, and decrease nervousness. Keep in mind that there are several fatty acids that can be classified as "omega 3" based on their chemical structure, but there is only one omega 3 fatty acid that your horse cannot produce on his own and which, therefore, must be in his diet: Alpha Linolenic Acid (or ALA). Given this, however, your horse can manufacture two other omega 3s, docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA).

Fresh grass has ample omega 3s -- four times more than omega 6s, which can promote inflammation. Hay, however, has virtually no omega 3s left. And commercial feeds usually contain soybean or corn oils, which are very high in omega 6s. While there's one omega 6 that is necessary -- linoleic acid -- too much of a good thing can create an imbalance.

To provide omega 3s, horse owners generally turn to one of three sources -- flaxseeds, chia seeds, or fish oils. The fat found in chia seeds and flaxseeds (oil or ground into a meal) is predominantly in the form of ALA; flax provides approximately 4:1 omega 3s to omega 6s, while chia has slightly fewer omega 3s.

Fish oils are high in two omega 3 fatty acids, DHA and EPA. Though horses are not fish-eaters, both of these fatty acids offer strong anti-inflammatory benefits and may be useful for heavily exercised muscles and joints. But fish oil does not provide the essential ALA. Therefore, supplementing the diet with flax or chia will better mimic the omega 3s found in plants -- what horses are designed to eat.

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