

How To Give Oral Medications

Why Do This?

There are many medications available for oral administration in horses. Some are ready-made in paste form, and others require a little preparation.

How To



Figure 1

If the drug is not pre-loaded in a measured syringe, you will need a dosing syringe with a catheter (nozzle) tip. Drugs that come in pill form will often dissolve if placed in a 60 ml dosing syringe with warm water and given adequate time (a few hours; Figure 1).

When dissolved, give it a shake, and go! Others may require manual grinding- a coffee grinder works very well, as will a mortar and pestle, both of which can be found at kitchen stores.

Flavouring agents such as applesauce, molasses, and corn syrup can make the process more appealing for the horse. Hearty eaters may accept the medications mixed in with their feed- but make sure they eat everything!

The best place to do this is in the stall, as most horses resist by backing up, and will quickly meet the rear wall if they do so.

Make sure the horse has no feed in its mouth, and rinse the mouth out if necessary. Dial up the required dose in pre-made syringes. For right-handers, stand by the right shoulder, facing in the same direction as the horse and holding the syringe in your right hand. Reach up and circle your left hand over the nose from the left side of the face. Controlling the head with your left hand, insert the syringe in as far a possible where you would place the bit, from the right side of the mouth. Most horses will voluntarily elevate the head at this point, but be sure to push the on roof of the mouth slightly with the syringe to stimulate this if they do not. Squirt the entire contents of the syringe towards the back of the mouth. Hold the head up for a few moments until the horse swallows. Reverse the directions if you are left-handed (Figure 2).



Figure 2

Occasionally, a horse will sit down or seem to faint when oral meds are given. This happens when sudden elevation of the head puts pressure on the blood vessels supplying the brain. Blood pressure in the brain drops rapidly, and the horse literally gets "head rush". There is no lasting harm in this alarming incident, but try to raise the head more slowly and to a lower angle next time.

