



[Calmers: which one to use](#)

[Back to Articles...](#)

SIMMER DOWN! Let's talk about Equine Calming Supplements!

Horses, much like their owners, are all individuals with their own unique likes/dislikes, quirks, and characteristics. In terms of training programs and performance expectations then, this means that "one size fits all" approaches rarely work for our equine partners. While some horses might not bat an eye in the face of an oncoming marching band, a mere rustling of leaves could send others into a full on meltdown! This can result from a myriad of individual and compounding factors such as genetic predisposition, negative past experiences, or even poor management. Once anxiety takes root in a horse's methods of behavior however, it can often manifest itself in conduct development that can be both challenging and potentially dangerous for both horse and rider.

It is important to remember as we manage our horses that the situations in which we place them, and the expectations that we have for their performance and behavior are dramatically different than those that horses would experience in the wild. Factors such as stabling, reduced interaction, contrived daily rhythms, and regimented feed programs can significantly impact a horse's demeanor and level of perceived anxiety. We also must remember that at their core, horses have evolved to be "flight" animals, and anytime a horse is placed in a stressful situation this instinct is immediately heightened. While the practice of utilizing calmers has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary show circles, benefits from these supplements extend far beyond the realms of the hunter ring. Horses that frequently exhibit displays associated with stress and anxiety are at a far greater risk of immunosuppression, gastric ulcerations, loss of muscle conditioning, inability to effectively recover from exercise, and impeded performance.

With this in mind, the practice of keeping horses mentally happy and healthy seems quite important indeed, and we consistently find that "calmers" are some of the most popular supplements leaving our shelves. While there are a plethora of products intended as calming agents (Omega Alpha Chill, Peak Performance Solace, and TRM's Good as Gold, etc) most contain similar ingredients that act upon your horse's central nervous system. Magnesium in particular, tends to generally be the primary active component of calming remedies. This key mineral is essential for effective functioning of the nervous system, helps in blood pressure regulation, and is an important factor in neural synapses. Let's take things back to Biology class for a moment... Imagine a nerve with magnesium inside of it. When a neural impulse is fired, the magnesium within the nerve becomes displaced and the nerve "reacts". When magnesium is deficient, the neural channels stay open longer than usual and the cells can become overly active. It is important to note that even when magnesium is found in the horse's diet, excitable horses or those in stressful situations simply metabolize and burn through available stores of magnesium at a far quicker rate than when at rest. This can lead to an overload of other minerals such as calcium in the muscles and nerves, which rapidly increase a horse's levels of adrenaline and cortisol. How does this manifest itself in your horse's behavior? Typical responses generally fall in the range of increased tension, aggression, unpredictability, and spookiness (aka your nice amateur hunter suddenly becomes a wannabe rodeo horse!)



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[Back to Articles...](#)

There are many choices on the market when it comes to selecting a calmer that works for you and your horse. At Greenhawk, our personal pick is TRM's Good as Gold. Pictured below is Greenhawk owner Jenn McGinn aboard her lovely mare Zalika at the 2014 Brandon Winter Fair. Jenn and "Zoe" were this year's winners of the \$5000 Jump Canada Hunter Classic, and Jenn credits "Good as Gold" as being an important component of her horse show preparation routine. Jenn keeps Zoe on the Good as Gold daily powder supplement, which helps to regulate calcium levels. During horse show days Zoe gets magnesium based Good as Gold syringe. While you can use the two products independently, studies suggest that the calcium/magnesium balance can successfully triple the efficacy of the product.

We hope that this article has provided you with some insight into your horse's behavior patterns, and has answered some queries that you might have had regarding calming supplements. Got any more questions? Stop by Greenhawk Calgary and ask! We are always happy to help in any way that we can, and look forward to helping you and your horse reach your goals this show season.