What are the Risks?

Efficacy – There is no guarantee that a nutraceutical will be beneficial to, or even have any effect on, horse health. Many claims of effect are unproven.

Purity – Some nutraceutical companies do not test their products, and thus cannot ensure that illegal or prohibited substances are not present. Additionally, there may be significant active ingredient variation from batch to batch and from different sources of nutraceuticals.

Safety – There are safety requirements for feed supplements. Testing, if performed, for nutraceuticals is not to the same level of testing required for prescription drugs. For example, in an FDA-approved drug, the manufacturer must show efficacy and purity of the substance. That is not required for nutraceuticals. Contact the manufacturer for information regarding safety testing.

Clinical Testing – The specific substance may not have been tested in horses and its effect is therefore unknown. One significant concern in horses is whether a substance is absorbable in its gastrointestinal tract. If it is not, the result will be expensive manure.

Additional Resources

AAEP – Joint Health Supplements: Information and How to Read a Product Label: *aaep.org/horsehealth/joint-health-supplements-information-and-how-read-product-label*

FDA – Animal Food and Feeds: *fda.gov/animalveterinary/products/animalfood-feeds/default.htm*

National Animal Supplement Council – News regarding recalls, etc.: *nasc.cc/news/*

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Nutraceuticals 101: A Trainer's Guide

RMTC
Racing Medication & Testing Consortium

The Basics of Nutraceuticals

What are nutraceuticals?
Nutraceuticals are a type of oral supplement. The term is a combination of "nutrient" and "pharmaceutical."

Nutraceuticals include foods that are purported to provide health benefits beyond nutrition. They are often marketed as supportive of the health of the horse in various ways (e.g., digestive, joint, hoof, and immune system).

Nutraceuticals are available without a prescription through a range of sources: internet vendors, tack shops, feed stores and veterinarians.

Are nutraceuticals regulated?
In the United States, animal supplements are either considered food or medication. If they are intended to treat a disease, they are regulated as medication. If not, they are considered feed.

Feeds are not as closely regulated as medication. There is no pre-marketing approval process and their approval is based on safety – not proven effect.

Should I just Avoid Using Nutraceuticals?

Nutraceuticals are not inherently bad. In fact, with enough due diligence on specific products, there may be benefit to an individual horse receiving some nutraceuticals. It is important to consider the following information when evaluating a specific product:

- Is there an ingredient list on the package?
- Is there a lot number and expiration date?
- Has there been any peer-reviewed published research on the use of the nutraceutical or its constituent ingredients in horses?
- Does the packaging provide specific administration information?
- Are the claims made on the packaging too good to be true?