



Providing top nutrition for horses is a concern not only in terms of performance but also in terms of animal welfare

Balancing Diet Issues

INDIVIDUAL EQUINE NUTRITIONAL NEEDS OFTEN VARY

By AMANDA DUCKWORTH

WHEN IT COMES to feeding horses, there are some straightforward facts that nutritionists and veterinarians always point toward.

Not only are continuing education and understanding of equine nutrition a concern globally from a performance standpoint, they are also routinely referenced in terms of equine welfare. Making sure Thoroughbreds are given the best nutri-

tion possible is a vital part of the equation when it comes to their thriving—whether they are competing on the track, being retrained for another discipline, or becoming part of a breeding program.

As an herbivore, a horse has a diet reliant on access to quality grass and/or hay above all else. Of course, for domesticated horses, especially ones competing in sports, things get a bit more complicated.

In “Nutrition: The Key to Unlocking Your Horse’s Health” for the American Association of Equine Practitioners, Dr. Lydia Gray highlights 10 key points to equine nutrition. Leading the way, as one would expect, is forage.

“The most basic requirement in a horse’s diet is long-stem forage,” Gray said. “Ideally this comes in the form of fresh grass. If grass is not available, free-choice grass hay is the next best choice. Keeping hay in front of horses at all times allows them to most closely mimic their natural grazing behavior. When this feeding arrangement is not practical, horses should receive at least 1% of their body weight each day in forage, divided into as many meals as possible. For a 1,000-pound horse, this is about 10 pounds of hay per day by weight, not by volume (flakes).”

Some of the other factors the AAEP encourages owners to be familiar with include the fact that forage is incomplete nutrition: It is possible to over- and under-supplement a horse; be aware of each horse’s nutrient requirements; and understand how the equine digestive tract functions. All of these concerns can be part of the puzzle when it comes to developing a feeding program.

Gray talks about the balance needed in addressing these concerns.

“Because grass is deficient in certain minerals and hay is deficient in certain vitamins and minerals, horses need more than just forage as their diet,” Gray said. “However, when fortified grain is added to try and meet vitamin and mineral requirements, calories are also added, which some horses don’t need. In addition, these extra calories are usually from sugars and starches, which can be a problem for horses with health problems such as equine metabolic syndrome and polysaccharide storage myopathy.

“Fortunately, there are a variety of ways to meet a horse’s nutrient requirements that don’t tie needed vitamins and minerals with calories. The simplest op-

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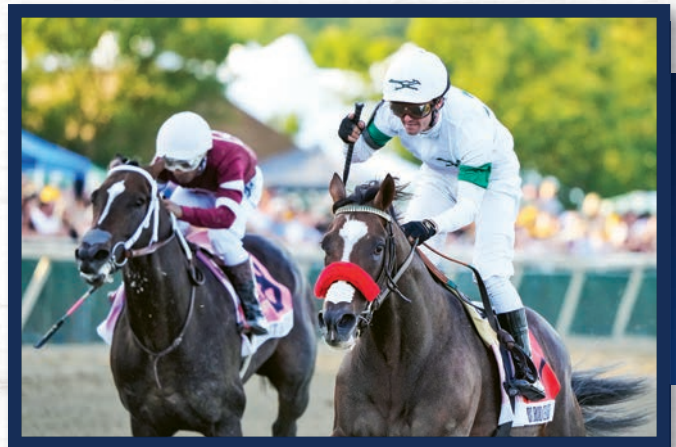
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When It Comes to Horse Health and Safety, Don't Hit the Easy Button

Many horse owners want to reduce the cost of treatment by reaching for a “compounded” version of altrenogest (a progestin used in veterinary medicine to suppress or synchronize estrus in horses) in long-acting injectable formulations. BUT AT WHAT COST TO YOUR HORSE?

A compounder simply mixes up a drug preparation and sells it *without any required testing for purity and concentration*. This has been illustrated many times by horses DYING from compounded medications that weren't tested before being sold. *Compounded products require no proof of efficacy*, so you have no proof the product is even altrenogest or is safe.

When you use only FDA approved altrenogest products such as Altren® (altrenogest)

Oral Solution manufactured by Aurora Pharmaceutical, the veterinarian and the horseman know the *ingredients have been tested for purity* and the final product has been *tested for purity and stability*. NO EXCEPTIONS. Also, before any drug formula is approved by the FDA, it must pass rigorous research trials that prove it is safe and works for its intended purpose.

So, the question every equine enthusiast must ask is *whether convenience is more important than the peace of mind that comes from using the approved and tested product in your expensive mare?* The answer should always be NO. Your equine partner will thank you.

—Content provided by Aurora Pharmaceutical, Northfield, Minn.
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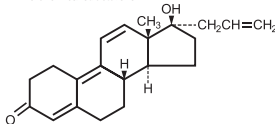
Altren® (altrenogest)

SOLUTION 0.22% (2.2 mg/mL)

CAUTION: Federal law restricts this drug to use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian.

DESCRIPTION:

Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% contains the active synthetic progestin, altrenogest. The chemical name is 17 α -allyl-17 β -hydroxyestra-4,9,11-trien-3-one. The CAS Registry Number is 850-52-2. The chemical structure is:



Each mL of Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% contains 2.2 mg of altrenogest in an oil solution.

ACTIONS:

Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% produces a progestational effect in mares.

INDICATIONS:

Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% is indicated to suppress estrus in mares. Suppression of estrus allows for a predictable occurrence of estrus following drug withdrawal. This facilitates the attainment of regular cyclicity during the transition from winter anestrus to the physiological breeding season. Suppression of estrus will also facilitate management of prolonged estrus conditions. Suppression of estrus may be used to facilitate scheduled breeding during the physiological breeding season.

CONTRAINDICATIONS:

Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% is contraindicated for use in mares having a previous or current history of uterine inflammation (i.e., acute, subacute, or chronic endometritis). Natural or synthetic gestagen therapy may exacerbate existing low-grade or “smoldering” uterine inflammation into a fulminating uterine infection in some instances.

PRECAUTIONS:

Various synthetic progestins, including altrenogest, when administered to rats during the embryonic stage of pregnancy at doses manifold greater than the recommended equine dose caused fetal anomalies, specifically masculinization of the female genitalia.

DOSAGE AND DIRECTIONS:

While wearing protective gloves, remove shipping cap and seal; replace with enclosed plastic dispensing cap. Remove cover from bottle dispensing tip and connect luer lock syringe (without needle). Draw out appropriate volume of Altren® solution. (Note: Do not remove syringe while bottle is inverted as spillage may result.) Detach syringe and administer solution orally at the rate of 1 mL per 110 pounds of body weight (0.044 mg/kg) once daily for 15 consecutive days. Administer solution directly on the base of the mare's tongue or on the mare's usual grain ration. Replace cover on bottle dispensing tip to prevent leakage. Excessive use of a syringe may cause the syringe to stick; therefore, replace syringe as necessary.

DOSAGE CHART:

Approximate Weight in Pounds	Dose in mL
770	7
880	8
990	9
1100	10
1210	11
1320	12

WHICH MARES WILL RESPOND TO ALTREN® (altrenogest) SOLUTION 0.22%:

Extensive clinical trials have demonstrated that estrus will be suppressed in approximately 95% of the mares within three days; however, the post-treatment response depended on the level of ovarian activity when treatment was initiated. Estrus in mares exhibiting regular estrus cycles during the breeding season will be suppressed during treatment; these mares return to estrus four to five days following treatment and continue to cycle normally. Mares in winter anestrus with small follicles continued in anestrus and failed to exhibit normal estrus following withdrawal.

Response in mares in the transition phase between winter anestrus and the summer breeding season depended on the degree of follicular activity. Mares with inactive ovaries and small follicles failed to respond with normal cycles post-treatment, whereas a higher proportion of mares with ovarian follicles 20 mm or greater in diameter exhibited normal estrus cycles post-treatment. Altrenogest Solution 0.22% was very effective for suppressing the prolonged estrus behavior frequently observed in mares during the transition period (February, March and April). In addition, a high proportion of these mares responded with regular estrus cycles post-treatment.

SPECIFIC USES FOR ALTREN® (altrenogest) SOLUTION 0.22%:

SUPPRESSION OF ESTRUS TO:

- Facilitate attainment of regular cycles during the transition period from winter anestrus to the physiological breeding season. To facilitate attainment of regular cycles during the transition phase, mares should be examined to determine the degree of ovarian activity. Estrus in mares with inactive ovaries (no follicles greater than 20 mm in diameter) will be suppressed but these mares may not begin regular cycles following treatment. However, mares with active ovaries (follicles greater than 20 mm in diameter) frequently respond with regular post-treatment estrus cycles.
- Facilitate management of the mare exhibiting prolonged estrus during the transition period. Estrus will be suppressed in mares exhibiting prolonged behavioral estrus either early or late during the transition period. Again, the post-treatment response depends on the level of ovarian activity. The mares with greater ovarian activity initiate regular cycles and conceive sooner than the inactive mares. Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% may be administered early in the transition period to suppress estrus in mares with inactive ovaries to aid in the management of these mares or to mares later in the transition period with active ovaries to prepare and schedule the mare for breeding.
- Permit scheduled breeding of mares during the physiological breeding season. To permit scheduled breeding, mares which are regularly cycling or which have active ovarian function should be given Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% daily for 15 consecutive days beginning 20 days before the date of the planned estrus. Ovulation will occur 5 to 7 days following the onset of estrus as expected for non-treated mares. Breeding should follow usual procedures for mares in estrus. Mares may be regulated and scheduled either individually or in groups.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

A 3-year well controlled reproductive safety study was conducted in 27 pregnant mares, and compared with 24 untreated control mares. Treated mares received 2 mL altrenogest solution 0.22%/110 lb body weight (2x dosage recommended for estrus suppression) from day 20 to day 325 of gestation. This study provided the following data:

- In filly offspring (all ages) of treated mares, clitoral size was increased.
- Filly offspring from treated mares had shorter interval from Feb. 1 to first ovulation than fillies from their untreated mare counterparts.
- There were no significant differences in reproductive performance between treated and untreated animals (mares & their respective offspring) measuring the following parameters:
 - interval from Feb. 1 to first ovulation, in mares only.
 - mean interovulatory interval from first to second cycle and second to third cycle, mares only.
 - follicle size, mares only.
 - at 50 days gestation, pregnancy rate in treated mares was 81.8% (9/11) and untreated mares was 100% (4/4).
 - after 3 cycles, 11/12 treated mares were pregnant (91.7%) and 4/4 untreated mares were pregnant (100%).
 - colt offspring of treated and control mares reached puberty at approximately the same age (82 & 84 weeks respectively).
 - stallion offspring from treated and control mares showed no differences in seminal volume, spermatozoal concentration, spermatozoal motility, and total sperm per ejaculate.
 - stallion offspring from treated and control mares showed no difference in sexual behavior.
 - testicular characteristics (scrotal width, testis weight, parenchymal weight, epididymal weight and height, testicular height, width & length) were the same between stallion offspring of treated and control mares.

REFERENCES:

Shoemaker, C.F., E.L. Squires, and R.K. Shideler, 1989. Safety of Altrenogest in Pregnant Mares and on Health and Development of Offspring. Eq. Vet. Sci. (9), No. 2: 69-72. Squires, E.L., R.K. Shideler, and A.O. McKinnon, 1989. Reproductive Performance of Offspring from Mares Administered Altrenogest During Gestation. Eq. Vet. Sci. (9), No. 2: 73-76.

WARNING:

For oral use in horses only. Keep this and all other medications out of the reach of children. Do not use in horses intended for human consumption.

HUMAN WARNINGS:

Skin contact must be avoided as Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% is readily absorbed through unbroken skin. Protective gloves must be worn by all persons handling this product. Pregnant women or women who suspect they are pregnant should not handle Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22%. Women of child bearing age should exercise extreme caution when handling this product. Accidental absorption could lead to a disruption of the menstrual cycle or prolongation of pregnancy. Direct contact with the skin should therefore be avoided. Accidental spillage on the skin should be washed off immediately with soap and water.

INFORMATION FOR HANDLERS:

WARNING: Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% is readily absorbed by the skin. Skin contact must be avoided; protective gloves must be worn when handling this product.

Effects of Overexposure

There has been no human use of this specific product. The information contained in this section is extrapolated from data available on other products of the same pharmacological class that have been used in humans. Effects anticipated are due to the progestational activity of altrenogest.

Acute effects after a single exposure are possible; however, continued daily exposure has the potential for more untoward effects such as disruption of the menstrual cycle, uterine or abdominal cramping, increased or decreased uterine bleeding, prolongation of pregnancy and headaches. The oil base may also cause complications if swallowed.

In addition, the list of people who should not handle this product (see below) is based upon the known effects of progestins used in humans on a chronic basis.

PEOPLE WHO SHOULD NOT HANDLE THIS PRODUCT:

- Women who are or suspect they are pregnant.
- Anyone with thrombophlebitis or thromboembolic disorders or with a history of these events.
- Anyone with cerebral-vascular or coronary-artery disease.
- Women with known or suspected carcinoma of the breast.
- People with known or suspected estrogen-dependent neoplasia.
- Women with undiagnosed vaginal bleeding.
- People with benign or malignant tumors which developed during the use of oral contraceptives or other estrogen-containing products.
- Anyone with liver dysfunction or disease.

Accidental Exposure

Altrenogest is readily absorbed from contact with the skin. In addition, this oil based product can penetrate porous gloves. Altrenogest should not penetrate intact rubber or impervious gloves; however, if there is leakage (i.e., pinhole, spillage, etc.), the contaminated area covered by such occlusive materials may have increased absorption. The following measures are recommended in case of accidental exposure.

Skin Exposure: Wash immediately with soap and water.

Eye Exposure: Immediately flush with plenty of water for 15 minutes. Get medical attention.

If Swallowed: Do not induce vomiting. Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% contains an oil. Call a physician. Vomiting should be supervised by a physician because of possible pulmonary damage via aspiration of the oil base. If possible, bring the container and labeling to the physician.

Store at or below 25° C (77° F). Reclose tightly.

HOW SUPPLIED:

Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% (2.2 mg/mL). Each mL contains 2.2 mg altrenogest in an oil solution. Available in 1000 mL and 150 mL plastic bottles.

Manufactured by:
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 Northfield, Minnesota 55057



Approved by FDA under ANADA # 200-620

042019



FDA-approved Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% is indicated to suppress estrus in mares. Altren is the only oral progestin available in a 150 mL single horse dosing package

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Managing Estrus to Fit Your Schedule

Altren® (altrenogest) Solution 0.22% is contraindicated for use in mares with a previous or current history of uterine inflammation. Talk to your veterinarian about proper use and safe handling of Altren. Avoid skin contact and always wear protective gloves when administering. Pregnant women, or women who suspect they are pregnant, should not handle Altren. Refer to the package insert by visiting www.aurorapharmaceutical.com for complete product information.

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your veterinarian
or equine health
care professional**

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Equine nutritionists or veterinarians can help develop feed programs to fit each horse



tion is to provide your pasture horse with minerals or your horse on hay with a multi-vitamin/mineral supplement.”

For obvious reasons, working with a certified equine nutritionist or veterinarian is often recommended when figuring out what diet works best for any given horse. However, because con-

tinuing equine nutrition education is not always something that occurs, it is important to make sure those asked to have a say in a horse's feeding program are truly comfortable participating. In February 2022, the *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education* published “An Investigation into Equine Nutrition Knowledge and Educational Needs of Equine Veterinarians.”

“This study investigated equine nutrition knowledge and educational needs of licensed veterinarians in the United States who were exclusively or predominately equine practitioners,” explained researchers. “It found veterinarians regard their peers as an important resource of nutritional knowledge, ranking ahead of all other sources except a PhD equine nutritionist.”

However, while the belief in the veterinary community at large was strong, belief in oneself was lacking when it came to nutritional knowledge. The study found that only 21% of veterinarians felt good about their knowledge level in equine nutrition after graduating from veterinary school and only 25% of veterinarians pursued continuing education in terms of nutrition within the past year.

According to the veterinarians in the study, 82% provide nutritional advice to clients, but they devoted only 65 minutes per year, on average, to improving their knowledge of equine nutrition.

“This study revealed that time spent practicing veterinary medicine increases a veterinarian's self-perceived knowledge level of equine nutrition, shifting from just below average after graduation from veterinary school to just above average at the time of this study,” according to researchers. “The majority (70%) of veterinarians in this study believe nutrition is very important in their practice philosophy, and 71% showed interest in taking online continuing education courses; thus, curriculum should be developed and offered in areas of need as identified by this study.

“These areas include insulin resistance, equine gastric ulcer syndrome, equine metabolic syndrome, performance

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Nutrition

horses, equine pituitary pars intermedia dysfunction, equine polysaccharide storage myopathy, and arthritis/joint pain, along with how to assess nutritional status during general wellness examinations.”

In April 2021, *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Equine Practice* published “What Would Be Good for All Veterinarians to Know About Equine Nutrition.” As one would expect, forage is a focus because of the impact a lack of it will have on a horse. It also delves deeper into how nutrition and overall equine health are forever linked.

“Veterinarians/veterinary surgeons are often considered by horse owners, and sometimes themselves, to be a major source of good quality, unbiased knowledge with respect to equine nutrition,” explained the authors. “Nutrition and management have enabling and supporting roles to play in the health, welfare, and performance of equines.

“Poor or inappropriate nutrition may therefore impose limits on an animal’s ability to perform and adversely affect health and welfare. Understanding the gastrointestinal tract from a nutrition perspective can help to reduce the risk of certain clinical problems.”

Basic nutrition is a cornerstone of animal welfare, and something those in Thoroughbred racing—both domestically and internationally—point to as a primary concern, both in regard to peak performance and maintaining a social license to operate. In May 2021, *Animals (Basel)* published “Identification of



Fresh grass is ideal for providing long-stem forage

Thoroughbred Racehorse Welfare Issues by Industry Stakeholders,” a study conducted in Australia.

“The Thoroughbred racing industry is frequently challenged by the public on welfare and ethics issues, especially the high wastage rates of racehorses,” explained researchers. “In addressing the welfare issues, it is important to assess the ability of the Thoroughbred racehorse to adapt to a closely managed environment and the extreme workloads, with the latter restricted by its flexibility in both behavioral and physical phenotype.

“Furthermore, the social nature of the horse and its natural existence in a home range are also important, both of which are precluded when Thoroughbred racehorses are kept isolated in stables. Stable design frequently prevents physical and visual contact between equines, and frequent turnover of Thoroughbred racehorses makes the group unstable. Nutrition is very



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Left, nutrition can impact horses' health, welfare, and performance; Middle, there are a variety of ways to meet a horse's nutrient requirements; Right, providing access to hay for horses in training allows them to mimic their natural grazing behavior

different from a natural feeding pattern, which produces regular food intake to support digestion in the gastrointestinal tract. In stables, cereals usually are the main feed, offered in a small number of meals with a limited amount of hay.”

Researchers reached out to experts in

the racing industry including breeders, veterinarians, trainers, owners, government officials, sales people, farriers, transporters, and horse re-trainers for post-racing activities. In total, 14 key welfare issues were identified, and in a survey, 224 responding stakeholders

ranked the issues in declining importance.

Using adaptive conjoint analysis, the results were as follows: horsemanship > health and disease > education of the horse > track design and surface > ventilation > stabling > weaning > transport

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“Relatively uniform responses to the survey by the different stakeholder groups suggest that there is a common view on what had the biggest impact on welfare,” researchers found. “An exception was a greater rating given by women than men to the importance of correct horse nutrition.”

It is well known that horses in active training live a very different lifestyle than their counterparts. As such, understanding how that can impact their nutritional needs is a key component to overall welfare.

“The digestive system of the Thoroughbred racehorse can also cause welfare problems in the intensively managed, stabled Thoroughbred racehorse with decreased gastrointestinal function, which often results in gastric ulcers, colic, and laminitis,” explained researchers. “Feral or free-ranging horses spend between 50% and 70% of their day

grazing while Thoroughbred racehorses are fed mainly high energy concentrated grain diets, which may take only 15% of their time to consume. Reduced gastrointestinal function leads to painful conditions such as colic, laminitis, and gastric ulcers, inducing stereotypic behavior in stabled Thoroughbred racehorses.

“Welfare problems stemming from poor nutrition are not universal, which explains its middle ranking in our survey. It is of interest that the re-trainers, farriers, and veterinarians rated nutrition as a less important issue for the welfare of Thoroughbred racehorses.”

In April 2019, *Animals (Basel)* published “Living the ‘Best Life’ or ‘One Size Fits All’—Stakeholder Perceptions of Racehorse Welfare,” which involved a survey of British horseracing stakeholders.

In total, 10 focus groups were held with a total of 42 stakeholders, including trainers, stable staff, and veterinarians. They were asked to describe “best life”

as well as “minimum welfare” standards for a horse in training. They also were asked to identify the main challenges of equine welfare and to share any innovative approaches to improve the lives of racehorses.

“Across all themes, horses living the ‘best life’ were perceived as being treated as individuals rather than being part of a ‘one size fits all’ life when kept under minimum welfare standards,” researchers said. “Health was perceived both as the main challenge to welfare as well as one open to innovative practices such as improved veterinary treatments.”

When it came to examining the feeding regimen of racehorses, the conclusion of what separates “best life” from “minimum welfare” is one that horse owners anywhere are familiar with: cost.

“The main distinction between the two scenarios was an economic one when feeding was discussed,” researchers found. “Concentrates and forage



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were perceived as being ‘top-quality feedstuffs and supplements,’ with ‘top-quality forage sourced from anywhere in the world.’

“Emphasis was put on feeding the individual where a horse was given ‘ad-libitum forage (tailored to individual) and fed ‘specialist feed, (tailored to each horse)’ that was fed as a ‘minimum three times daily regular balanced diet and appropriate formula for work done.’ Water was seen as a necessity either as ‘ad-lib clean water’ or as ‘automatic water’ as in automatic drinking bowls.”

Minimum standards had a more one-size-fits-all approach, although the basics of what should be provided remained the same as in the “best life” scenario.

“Feeding methods were more gener-

alized although it was suggested that minimum welfare standards were the same for ‘best life:’ ‘...liberal roughage; ad-lib hay, hard feed, based on current exercise,’ ‘safe food, not out of date,’ ‘concentrates and roughage,’ ‘sufficient feed and haylage,’ and ‘good quality clean forage and feed (not harmful).’

“The number of times horses were fed was perceived as less flexible with, ‘no variety in (rigid) routine of feeding,’ as well as ‘severely restricted forage and too much concentrates proportionately,’ indicative of standards below the minimum. ‘Ad-lib clean water’ was viewed as a necessity although no one suggested any other method for providing water.”

When it came to innovative and uncommon practices, 10 of the 13

participants pointed to advancement in veterinary care, but there were no statements that corresponded to daily routine and monitoring, feeding, staff management and education, or policy and procedures.

In the equestrian world, there is never a dearth of opinions on best practices, but giving a horse access to good grass or high-quality hay is one thing on which basically everyone agrees.

What a horse’s diet looks like beyond that is largely dependent on the animal itself. Working with an equine nutritionist or a veterinarian comfortable in the field of nutrition is important due to the multiple factors at play both in terms of maximizing athletic potential and meeting the social obligations of basic equine welfare. **BH**



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