

IF YOU ARE EXPECTING

YOU WILL LEARN

How to feed your
pregnant mare

Safety considerations
for foaling down

The vaccinations your
mare should receive

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IF YOU ARE EXPECTING

Caring for your mare's health is vital to a successful pregnancy and delivery. We outline the 3 key areas.

A mare's gestation period is normally between 320 and 345 days... A long time to wait for something to go wrong.

It is best to plan for the arrival well before the due date and have everything on hand that you may need. There are a few things that you need to consider before your precious bundle arrives. These include nutrition, housing, and vaccinations and worming.

The most common error in feeding is to overfeed the pregnant mare and underfeed the lactating mare.

NUTRITION

Nutrition during pregnancy is essential for the growing foetus' optimum development, as well as for proper colostrum and milk production during lactation.

The most common error in feeding broodmares is to overfeed the pregnant mare and underfeed the lactating mare. Just because she is pregnant, she doesn't need to eat for two!

When you feed pregnant mares, it is easiest to break it into three periods:

1. First two trimesters
2. Last trimester
3. Lactation



HOUSING

Once nutrition is sorted out, it is time to think about where your mare will give birth. The ideal area for foaling is a grassed flat area with appropriate fencing to protect the foal from predators and injury, while they are learning to use their legs and are unsteady on their feet.

The paddock should be free of manure and obstacles and, ideally, should be rested for a few weeks before the mare goes in to foal down. A paddock away from other horses is also best so the mare can concentrate on the task at hand and not have to worry about nosey paddock mates.

Fencing is important as foals have a tendency to lay right near the fence and often find themselves on the other side when they get up. Mesh fencing is good as it prevents foxes or dogs from entering, and also stops the foal from escaping. Electric fencing should be switched off during labour and until the foal is steady on their feet.

Mares should be placed in the foaling paddock a few weeks or so before foaling, so she can become accustomed to the pasture and the bacteria in the soil, allowing her to pass on antibodies, so her foal will be protected at birth.

If you are going to stable the mare for the birth, the stable needs to be at least 6 x 7 meters to prevent the mare from casting herself and also allow her to move around during labour. If the stable is too small, there is a higher risk of the mare injuring the foal as she is getting up and down with contractions, and as the foal is coming out. There is also the risk of the mare laying or standing on the foal.

However, the advantages of stabling are the mare and foal are protected from the elements if it is raining, windy or cold. Foals struggle to regulate their body temperature if they are too cold or too wet, and this can often use up the little energy reserves they have.

Each of these periods represent different energy, protein, trace elements, calcium and phosphorous requirements for the mare. This article is far too brief to go into nutrition in-depth, so I will only briefly explain these areas.

The first period is the best time to modify a mare's body condition, if required. Losing weight or gaining weight is safest in this period as the nutrient requirement is no different to a mature horse maintenance diet. The foal does not increase in size much during this period. Overweight mares risk having birthing problems, due to poor muscle tone and condition, and the mare risks having no energy stores for the birthing process.

The second period sees the foal increase in size and weight by two-thirds. Therefore, the energy, protein, calcium, phosphorus and mineral requirement for the mare increases during this period. Allowing your mare to put on too much weight at this stage however, can be dangerous and lead to distocias, such as a large foal, or joint issues after birth.

The final period is one of high physiological stress for the mare. The lactating mare's nutrient requirements are greater than any other class of horse. The mare must recover from parturition, as well as produce colostrum and milk.



Herpes virus can cause abortion in mares or respiratory issues with unborn foals.

VACCINATIONS AND WORMING

There are several vaccinations you may want to give your mare during her pregnancy. The most important being tetanus, which is usually combined with strangles, commonly named “2 in 1”.

If you are unsure of your mare’s vaccination history, it is best to give her the correct course of tetanus and strangles to confirm she is fully vaccinated. If you just administer a booster, she will not mount a proper immune response to the organisms.

The best time to give the mare her annual booster is if she has had the initial course is four weeks prior to her due date. This allows the mare to pass the antibodies onto her foal, so they are covered at birth also.

Herpes virus vaccines are also available against Herpes virus 1 and 4. This disease can cause abortion in mares or respiratory issues with unborn foals. The vaccine needs to be given at five, seven and nine months of gestation.

Depending on where you live, sometimes Salmonella may be vaccinated against also. Salmonella can be caused by feed contaminated by mice and rats, or faecal contamination from the mare or other horses.

It is usually caught by foals either through ingestion or contamination through the umbilicus. This can lead to infection and diarrhoea in foals, which can develop into septicemia. Mares should be vaccinated six weeks prior to foaling.

If they have not been previously vaccinated, an initial vaccine is required four weeks prior to the six week one. It is not recommended that mares are vaccinated less than four weeks prior to foaling.

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Make sure the label states it is safe to worm pregnant mares as some are not safe during pregnancy.

There are many wormers on the market, so make sure the label states it is safe to worm pregnant mares as some are not safe during pregnancy. If you are nervous about worming your mare, worm her the day she foals, and remove mare and foal from the foaling paddock, so she does not contaminate the pasture. Be sure to pick up all of her manure in the paddock to remove the eggs in the faeces that may be passed before the adult worms are killed off.

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DR LOUISE COSGROVE

Having spent most of her childhood in the saddle, it was a natural transition into equine veterinary medicine for Louise, founder of Exclusively Equine Veterinary Services and HorseBarn Education. A practicing equine vet, Louise is passionate about empowering horse owners, like you, with a deeper understanding of horse health, so you can give your horse a longer, healthier future.

If you have any questions regarding your horse, you're welcome to contact me personally.

 07 5411 4554  drlouise@horsebarn.education