

THE 10 GOLDEN RULES WHEN FEEDING HORSES

YOU WILL LEARN

10 golden rules you
need to implement

How correct feeding
supports horse health

How you can save on your
feed bill from now on

FEEDING HORSES

The 10 golden rules you need to implement at feed time for your horse

Following these 10 rules will allow you to get the most value for money when feeding your horse and will also limit the chances of your horse developing colic. This, in turn, will decrease costly veterinary bills.

1 FREE ACCESS TO FRESH CLEAN WATER

This is very important as the horse is such a large animal and, depending on their workload and environment, the average 500kg horse can drink anywhere from 20 to 70 litres of water per day. Water is a vital requirement for every organ in the horse, in particular, the digestive system. It is also important to consider how you store the water because, sometimes in Summer (particularly in Queensland and the other northern states) if water is stored in the direct sun, it can heat up to temperatures where a horse is reluctant to drink it.

2 FEED ONLY GOOD QUALITY FEEDS

There are many feeds available, as you would know if you have ever visited a produce store. It is always important to only feed products that are not spoiled or mouldy, and are free from contaminants and dust. The feed should not smell mouldy or be wet when you purchase it. If you feed mouldy hay or feed to your horse, they can develop colic very quickly and need to be treated immediately to prevent poisoning.

3 FEED BY WEIGHT NOT VOLUME

Commercial foods always have a feeding recommendation for their particular feed. Always weigh the feed to see how much a 'scoop' is so you are feeding the correct amount. Depending on the size of your scoop and the feed you are feeding, it can often be twice as much in weight then you should be feeding. To give you an example, a scoop of pollard would weigh a lot less than a scoop of workhorse mix. Always weigh out the amount you should be feeding your horse and then convert to the number of scoops required.



4 DON'T FEED THE WRONG FEED TO THE WRONG HORSE

Horses of different ages, breeds and workloads all require different levels of nutrients and energy. One of the most common mistakes is feeding your horse more energy than they need. This leads to health problems, such as obesity and laminitis, or behavioural issues where your horse is uncontrollable, due to increased energy levels.

Extruded feeds are scientifically balanced to provide exactly what your horse needs, depending on the type of feed and its target horse. For example, Mitavite Gumnuts is balanced for aged horses because they need slow release energy, compared to racehorses who need a much higher energy level to run fast over short distances.



5 HORSES NEED FIBRE

If your horse doesn't have access to good quality pasture, you need to supplement their diet with hay. Choosing the right hay depends on what else you are feeding your horse and the energy requirements of your horse. Roughage should make up 50% of your horse's diet as it is imperative for a healthy digestive system. If your horse doesn't have access to pasture, due to drought or being stabled, it becomes difficult to meet this requirement. Different types of hay have different nutritional levels, with lucerne hay usually being the highest in nutrients, but also sugars. This can be a negative if your horse is overweight or prone to laminitis.

6 IF CHANGING FEEDS, DO IT GRADUALLY

Horses have quite a delicate digestive system with specific bacteria present. A sudden change in diet can upset the bacteria, which can lead to colic. The key is to gradually add the new feed to the normal diet over a week or two to allow the bacteria to adjust. This even applies to different types of hay or pasture.

7 FEED AT THE SAME TIME DAILY

Horses are creatures of habit and, if you feed horses at the same time daily, it limits ulcers forming and digestive upsets. Horses release gastric enzymes in anticipation for feeding time, but when dinner is delayed or late, these enzymes start digesting the stomach lining causing ulceration. Ulcers can manifest as colic when they are large and numerous.

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8 ONLY FEED SUPPLEMENTS IF REQUIRED

If you are feeding your horse an extruded feed suitable for its age and workload, you do not need to give any supplements. Extruded feeds are scientifically balanced to supply every nutrient, mineral and trace element that your horse needs. Many people feed supplements to their horse without looking at the diet to see if they need to.

Most supplements won't harm your horse if they are not required as your horse just excretes what it doesn't need. However, the problem with this is they are usually excreting all of your money out as well. The only time you need to consider supplements is if your horse is mostly on pasture, and the pasture lacks appropriate nutrients and minerals. This can happen during a drought or Winter in most areas of Australia.

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DON'T EXERCISE YOUR HORSE STRAIGHT AFTER FEEDING

When your horse digests food, it diverts blood from around the body to the digestive system to help remove nutrients and energy. If you ask your horse to exercise in the middle of this process, the blood gets re-diverted to the muscles and digestion is stopped. This can lead to stomach upset and potentially colic.

10

FEED ACCORDING TO IDEAL BODY WEIGHT AND TEMPERAMENT

This is the one rule that is broken the most. Over feeding your horse is just as cruel as underfeeding. People are often tempted to overfeed their horse. They supply far more energy to their horse than is required. When excess energy is given, the horse stores it for later in the form of fat, so the horse puts on weight.

If you have an underweight horse, it is best to feed according to their ideal weight. This allows them to store energy and put on weight. Overweight horses should be fed for their ideal weight, not what they actually weigh and they should be exercised more, so they burn excess fat.

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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.

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