

General Guidelines for Feeding Horses

1. The diet should contain a balance between roughage e.g. hay, chaff, pasture and concentrates e.g. grains, protein meal and fats. A maintenance diet is 1.5-2% of body weight to meet daily energy requirements. Proportions are 80-100% roughage and 0-20% concentrates by weight. Good quality mixed pasture is the ideal food for horses.
2. Horses grazing tropical grasses e.g. kikuyu, setaria, buffel grass, green panic, guinea grass, para grass, pangola grass and signal grass are at risk of suffering from calcium deficiency. Supplementation should be provided e.g. lucerne, mineral supplement (*Calsorb*, *Bone Formula* or *Equilibrium*) or home-made mix e.g. 1kg rock phosphate + 1.5kg molasses or 1.33kg ground limestone + 0.66kg dicalcium phosphate + 1.5kg molasses.
3. The ration should be modified to suit the horse, be palatable, economical and supply the horse's nutritional requirements. Feed to maintain the desired condition score. Cater to the individual preferences.
4. Feed at regular times, at least twice daily to confined horses or those with limited access to grazing. Provide most of the bulk overnight as hay to confined horses.
5. Regularly check feed quality. Do not feed dusty, mouldy or contaminated feed, left-over feed or poor quality feeds. If feed is measured by volume, weigh feed occasionally to ensure correct quantities are being fed.
6. The ration should be thoroughly mixed. Dampen with water to reduce dust.
7. The ration should be freshly mixed for each feed. Dry mixes can be stored for a day but dampened feed should be fed within the hour. Remove leftovers before new feed is given.
8. Maintain good horse husbandry e.g. attend to general health, parasite control, dental care and daily exercise either loose in paddock or being actively exercised.
9. Fresh clean water at all times. A horse consumes 30-50l water/day depending on size, climate and activity.
10. Limit sudden changes in ration ingredients or proportions. Introduce changes over 7-10 days. Avoid changes in diet within a few days of a competition.
11. Avoid sudden increases or rapid introduction of concentrates. Keep the work level ahead of the feed.
12. Restrict concentrate intake on rest days e.g. reduce concentrates to 1/3 on the night before planned rest days. Replace concentrates with hay or chaff. Re-introduce concentrates gradually e.g. for 1 day off work, take 2 days to return to full concentrate intake.
13. Do not allow horses to gorge concentrates or allow ponies unlimited grazing on lush spring pasture. Maximum grain intake is 0.5kg/100kg e.g. 2.5kg/500kg horse. Mix concentrates with chaff or cubes. Restrict pasture access to ponies and horses prone to laminitis.

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14. Do not feed hay or concentrates on the ground or from dirty feed bins. Separate feed bins and water troughs. Ensure feed bin is of adequate size, with safe edges and heavy enough to prevent a horse from tipping it over. Feed at ground level not with feed bin raised.

15. Restrict the intake of hay just before working a horse and avoid exercising a horse on a full stomach.

16. Limit access to large volumes of cold water immediately after strenuous exercise. Allow a few swallows initially of water, then more in 10 minutes. Take the chill off very cold water by adding hot water.

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