

## Equine Nutrition

The task of restoring an underweight horse's health is a multifaceted endeavor. Good nutrition for weight gain is of course vital, and depending on the severity of the starvation the equine's intake needs to be limited in order to prevent re-feeding syndrome and / or other health complications including colic and laminitis.

You will find that not every horse will respond to one feeding regimen, so you must be willing to be flexible and willing to adapt your feeding plan to each horse as needed.

Your nutrition program can be planned according to your situation and the availability of certain feeds in your area. While Alfalfa hay is the choice of many equine nutritionists as the best diet - many veterinarians have their own preferences. Design a basic feeding plan with the assistance of your veterinarian which may include the addition of certain prepared horse feeds such as a good quality senior feed. Senior feed is easy on their digestive system, high in fiber and fat and is considered a "complete feed" which does not require the addition of hay or grass to the diet. This is especially important for the equine who may have dental issues, such as Senior horses or those in need of dental care.

Some of the things to consider along with a carefully planned diet are:

1. Parasite control. Rescue groups can learn to perform fecal sample testing in order to determine which parasites are present. The benefit is that the most effective paste wormer can be used if the parasites have been identified, and helps to reduce veterinary fees if these tests can be performed by the personnel at your facility. A simple and inexpensive student microscope along with the necessary supplies can be purchased online for a reasonable fee.
2. The process of de worming horses can disrupt the natural balance of "good bacteria" in the gut. The use of probiotics can be added to the diet in order to restore this balance and improve digestive system health, which aids in ensuring that the nutrients given to the horse are able to be effectively processed.
3. When additional calories are needed to help with weight gain, the addition of soaked beet pulp can be very beneficial especially for horses with metabolic or insulin issues. Beet pulp is a good source of fiber which is beneficial to the digestive system, and when soaked is a good source of additional water. It also has the added benefit of helping to eliminate sand from the system.
4. In certain areas of the country sand can build up in the colon, and may cause a multitude of problems including colic and diarrhea. The addition of Psyllium, sold by several different companies in products such as "Sand Clear" can be a great aid in helping to eliminate sand from their system.
5. A fresh supply of clean, cool water (sometimes during the winter you may need to warm the water a bit) must be available to the equine at all times. While automatic waterers are wonderful for most instances, you may need to monitor the amount the horse is drinking by

providing buckets of water instead of an automatic water source. For a horse who is not motivated to drink well, the addition of salt in their feed can help encourage them to drink, and soaked beet pulp is another way to provide some additional water to their diet . Free choice salt in the form of salt blocks or loose salt in a container should be available to them. Placing it near their water source is helpful.

6. Dehydration is a common health issue in these equines which needs to be addressed as a part of the overall nutrition program. The effects of dehydration are several fold and will need to be treated accordingly. IV Fluids may be needed in severe cases, and for horses that are not willing to drink you can help them to begin the hydration process through oral administration of water through a syringe. Electrolytes can be given to them as well if your veterinarian recommends it, and can be purchased in pre-measured syringes and kept on hand in the event that they are needed.
  
7. One of the results of dehydration is that it can contribute to anemia. Your veterinarian can recommend a supplement such as red cell formula to help restore vitamins, minerals and help raise the red blood cell count to help reverse anemia. Parasites can be an additional cause of anemia as they may cause bleeding in the stomach and intestines. So your de worming program plays a vital role.

One of the most rewarding aspects of horse rescue work, is being able to see the results of providing the right combination of nutritional support in order to restore the health of the horse you have taken in to help. Common sense, patience and collaboration among all of the members of your team will all contribute to a successful re-feeding program, and give the horse a great start to a new life.

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