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FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE.

Although balancer pellets have been around for a while they are still not clearly understood. This often leads to unnecessary feeding and/or unbalanced rations- the very opposite of what they are designed to do.

What are Balancers?

Balancers are created to be a low intake, highly concentrated source of amino acids (protein), vitamins and minerals, designed for all types of horses to provide essential nutrients without the calorie component of the diet.

Balancers are generally formulated to be fed alongside forage (pasture, hay, chaffs), to ensure that the daily essential nutrients, that might not be available in forage, are provided in "balance". They can also be used if necessary alongside traditional feeds.

Couldn't a vitamin and mineral supplement be used?

Generally, vitamin and mineral supplements only supply microminerals (such as copper, zinc, selenium) and vitamins with little or no protein or macro minerals (such as calcium, phosphorus and magnesium). Balancers, however, can supply all these nutrients meaning they are more inclusive and more of an "All" round extra.

Balancers contain quality protein which supplies essential amino acids. Amino acids are the building blocks of all body tissues,

including horn, hair, muscle and bone which is vitally important especially for animals at various life stages such as growing animals or lactating mares. Also, some balancers can contain one or more "digestive enhancers", to help maintain digestive efficiency. No other type of vitamin and mineral supplement should be needed alongside a balancer as this could lead to an oversupply of nutrients.

My horse is overweight, so I don't need to feed him anything?

It's often tempting to think that because a horse is overweight that all of its needs are provided from hay and grazing alone.

Even the best grazing will have imbalances and therefore a balancer should be considered for even overweight horses to ensure their requirement for essential nutrients is met.

Balancers do not contribute significant amounts of energy (calories) due to the low energy ingredients included as well as the low feeding rate. Therefore, they make the ideal feed for horses that don't require additional energy/calories to avoid weight gain.

Can I use a balancer to add weight to my horse?

Due to balancers not providing much in the way of energy (calories) a balancer alone is not going to put weight on your horse. However, if the horse's diet is lacking balance then it stands to reason that the horse's body may not be working at its best and thus adding a balancer can help with providing essential nutrients which will not only improve overall health but digestive health too. With an efficiently working digestive system the horse can fully utilise all the components of the diet which could help with achieving more condition and overall weight gain.

Balancers make my horse hot, because the protein is so high.

One of the biggest questions when it comes to balancers is the level of protein. Most balancers are around **25%** protein, and this often strikes fear into the hearts of many potential users. However, one must remember that protein is not energy and thus it will not make your horse hot or excitable and is an extremely essential part of the diet. If you do the calculation **25%** protein is **250g** of protein per kg of feed. Balancers are generally fed in very small quantities with the average being around **500g** per **500kg** horse per day, thus only working out to **125g** protein per **500g** supplementation per day or **12.5%** per **500g**. If you fed **3kg** of a **10%** concentrate then your horse will be receiving **300g** of protein, far more than the balancer pellet.

Often after using a balancer for a period some horses feel "well" overall and often exhibit a more vibrant temperament. This often leads people to remove the balancer and in reality the balancer should remain to allow the horse's body to continue to receive a full balance of nutrients and after a while such changes will subside.

When should I feed a balancer and how much should I feed?

1. *When the diet consists of forage alone.*
2. *You are feeding straights, like oats and/or barley, alongside forage.*
3. *Used as a top dressing to your concentrate feed: - this includes:*
 - *feeding less than the recommended amount of hard feed, alongside forage.*
 - *feeding a compound feed that is formulated for horses working at lower levels than yours.*

1: Fed alone to provide essential nutrients for horses fed on only hay and grazing.

Often it is thought that hay and grazing alone will be enough, and while in some cases that will be true for calories, generally hay and grazing today is not nutritionally balanced so providing a balancer can be useful. This is especially true when working with stud animals

that have 24hour grazing but need a higher rate of nutrients due to life stage (eg late pregnancy, lactation, weaning). On average for horses not receiving any other concentrate feed it is suggested that 100g of balancer pellet per **100kg** of body weight is fed. For a **500kg** horse that would be **500g** per day. However, this depends on the horse's current diet, age and workload and life stage where a different amount may be needed.

2: Combined with straight grains, to create a more balanced ration.

Many people still like to create home mixes which often contain raw ingredients like cereal grains, chaffs, oil, brans alongside hay and grazing. While these are all perfectly good ingredients on their own, they are often very variable in vitamin and mineral content and not always complete. The benefit of adding a balancer is that you can guarantee a more inclusive/balanced diet ensuring your horse and pocket get the best of both worlds.

3: Fed as a top dressing to enhance the nutrient density of a commercial feed.

Using as a top dressing is often the most common way of using balancers. However, it is not necessary for all horses, especially those being fed higher than recommended levels of a commercial food. Horses that would benefit from a top dressing include those horses returning to work after illness, those that need more protein to support muscle development, mares in late pregnancy or lactation that maintain their weight easily but have higher protein, vitamin and mineral requirements, older horses, and younger horses. In these cases, it is advisable to feed at **50g-100g** per kg of body weight depending on individual circumstances.

A top dressing is also useful for those horses that are being fed below the recommended feeding rate of a commercial feed due to being overweight or having the tendency to become overweight easily. Commercial feeds are designed with minimum nutrient levels in mind and so if a product states **3kg** per day and you can only feed **1kg** (due to the horse putting on weight) then the vitamin and mineral levels could be unbalanced. In this situation for every 1kg under the recommended feeding rate you provide, add **100-250g** of balancer pellet, however every situation is different so do check this with the manufacturer first.

Balancers are also extremely useful for horse's that are working at higher levels than the feed is designed for. For example, some working horses do very well on a low energy product, however these feeds are generally designed for horses doing little to no work

and so if a hard-working horse is maintained on a product such as this they may again not be getting the correct nutrient levels to perform optimally.

Can a pony with Laminitis/Cushings/Insulin resistance be fed a balancer?

Balancers are for the most part low in starch, but they can vary in sugar level due to the variation in molasses (the most common binder for pellets) so do check with your manufacturer. Quality balancers will include a small amount of oil to help bind the ingredients without adding sugar to the diet which makes them suitable for horses with conditions such as laminitis, insulin resistance, tying up etc, alongside other low NSC products.

Which balancer should I choose?

There are many balancers on the market but often there will be slight variations in what is provided in each one and so that must be considered along with cost per bag.

Epol and Equus have two balancers to provide a range for all horses and uses:

The Epol All Phase Balancer

The All Phase balancer has been created with the performance horse in mind and thus its ideal for those working at higher levels. It is also suitable for "good-doers" that don't require the recommended level of concentrate and therefore may be compromised in terms of vitamins and minerals or for those that don't require large amounts of concentrates but have higher nutrient requirements such as breeding mares. Its lower energy level means that it can be added to a horse's current concentrate feed without altering the energy profile significantly. Acid Buff has also been incorporated into

the formulation as research has shown that this can help to support the optimum environment of the gut and help manage those horses with compromised digestive function, such as in the case of Hindgut Acidosis and EGUS (Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome). A digestive yeast is also provided as this too has been shown to help support feed and forage digestibility while assisting in the maintenance of stable gut flora population during times of stress.

The Equus All Time Balancer

Equus All Time Balancer is a concentrated source of essential nutrients which may be used to complement diets consisting of roughage (hay) and pasture only, as well as those being fed straight grains and/or a combination of the above. It is suitable for those that don't need traditional concentrates to ensure their overall health. In addition, All Time Balancer is low in starch and sugar, meaning it is suitable for equines prone to issues such as Laminitis, or Cushings. A digestive yeast is provided in order to support fibre-digesting bacteria, general gut health and digestive efficiency.

Conclusion

When used correctly balancer pellets are a useful tool to have on your yard, as it allows you to individually tailor each horse's diet to ensure they perform, reproduce, recover and maintain good health and well being without unnecessary extras or changes.

Do keep in mind that horses are all individual and therefore having a consultation with a nutritional advisor is worthwhile to ensure you are feeding correctly.

Equus provide a free consult service at your home or yard, contact us on 0734235491 or 0839986824 to speak to an advisor.



TESTIMONIALS

NATALIE INGGS

Thank you to Natalie for these lovely pictures of some of her wonderful horses. Natalie uses Epol All Phase Balancer alongside quality hay including Lucerne and nothing else.

"I have a mixture of youngsters, retired horses and those that are working and so the All Phase Balancer is the perfect addition to all of their diets. I can provide it in varying amounts depending on their individual needs and the results simply speak for themselves. Thank you Epol for a great product. "

COLLEEN DAVIS

I have used Equus All Time Balancer for a while now alongside the Equus Cool n Perform. It's the perfect addition to Kagera Sugar LTD Stables and Stud as it allows us to provide all the daily essentials without having to feed large amounts. This combination helps to maintain their condition during times of growth while their coats simply shine. Their temperament and energy levels do not change at all which is fantastic. Thank you Equus for such a great product, the results speak for themselves.



9 year old WB mare Justine DB



From Colleen Davis



6 year old Losgelassen Querido



From Colleen Davis