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# HOW HAYNET HEIGHT CAN AFFECT YOUR HORSE?

Although many owners and equestrian professionals have suspected that feeding height and position may be important, researchers had yet to investigate hay net height and their effects on the horses' back and neck.

Over the years slow feeders have gained in popularity, as they effectively keep horses eating for longer periods of the day which in turn can improve digestive health especially in situations where a continuous flow of ingesta is important such as assisting in the reduction of gastric ulcer risk and welfare. However, this has now posed a new issue, of eating-related posture changes.

"Depending on how high you tie your haynet, your horse's feeding-time neck positions likely won't be the same as when he's eating hay or grass off the ground. Those unnatural neck positions can have repercussions on the horse's back position and jaw angles throughout the hour's horses are pulling hay from their slow feeders" according to Italian researchers.

"We know that when riding horses, there are different kinds of postures that can affect their health and welfare," said Emanuela Valle, DVM, PhD, ECVCN, head of the clinical nutrition counseling group in the University of Turin's Department of Veterinary Science, in Italy. "But what about when we're feeding them? Posture is related to how the spine is aligned, and it's important to consider how our management affects it."

**During the research project Valle and her colleagues observed six Warmbloods, averaging 14 years old, as they ate hay from:**

- The ground;
- A haynet set low at about knee level, creating a neck level about 15 degrees below the withers; and
- A haynet set high at about 15 degrees above the withers.

They found that the low haynet position resulted in back positions that were almost the same as the natural position when horses ate off the ground, with elongated longissimus dorsi muscles, which run along each side of the horse's back and under where the saddle sits.

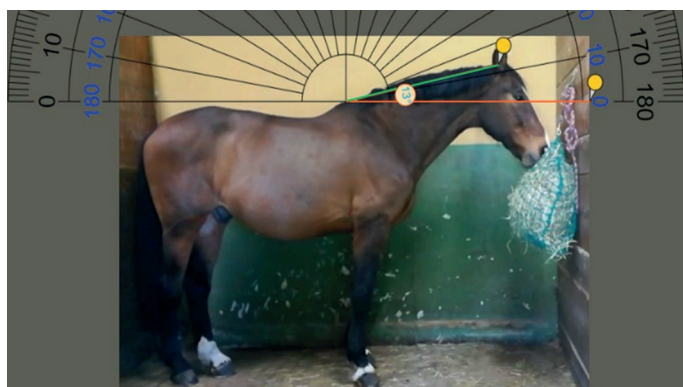


**FIGURE 1: LOW HAY NET POSITION (LP):**

**Figure 1: Low hay net position (LP):** angle formed between the yellow line running from the withers to the poll of the neck and the reference line crossing the withers and parallel to the ground.







**FIGURE 2: HIGH HAY NET POSITION (HP):**

**Figure 2: High hay net position (HP):**

At the high haynet position, the horses' back positions changed significantly, shortening the muscles.

The angle made between the horse's jawline and neckline when eating is perhaps equally important, and it was noted that as the horse's neck raised, that angle closed more and more, leading to acute and highly unnatural eating angles at the highest level.

"Both (off-the-ground) positions changed neck posture and the mandibular (lower jaw) angle, with extreme values reached when then neck was maintained above the withers,"

**Figure 3: Control position):**

Although it hasn't yet been studied its suspected that a natural feeding position is better both for the musculoskeletal system and the digestive system. Considering how much time horses spend eating from haynets, it's important to be cognizant of the bodily positions the feeders impose.



**FIGURE 3: CONTROL POSITION:**

However it should be noted that low haynets pose a risk to the horse as shoes and legs could get caught and the low haynet position used in this particular study is too low to be used safely in daily horse management.

Owners should consider multiple aspects of haynet positioning when it comes to their horses' safety, and other methods of slow feeding should perhaps be considered (if slow feeding is necessary) that provide the optimal body position safely.

Write up taken from the study Citation: Raspa, F.; Roggero, A.; Palestini, C.; Marten Canavesio, M.; Bergero, D.; Valle, E. Studying the Shape Variations of the Back, the Neck, and the Mandibular Angle of Horses Depending on Specific Feeding Postures Using Geometric Morphometrics. *Animals* 2021, 11, 763.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/ani11030763> | <https://www.mdpi.com/journal/animals>

## TESTIMONIALS

### **Belinda Martin**

Feeding competition horses can be tricky with some individuals more difficult than others. Cosmic Girl is a highly sensitive warmblood mare who is naturally "hot" and spooky. Over feeding her results in an un-ridable stress ball and yet she needs volume to maintain a healthy body weight.

Nice n Easy has worked very well for her. Inclusive of a pre-mix, we are assured of all the trace elements needed to make it a complete meal without heating her up.

***It works like a charm.***



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