



IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE - 1. CONCERNED WITH WEIGHT LOSS? 2. TESTIMONIALS

CONCERNED WITH WEIGHT LOSS?

At this time of year, there is often much focus on getting your horse into good condition before winter. So, what should you do if you have a horse that has previously gained or maintained weight consistently until suddenly, the diet doesn't seem to be having the same effect?

Often the temptation is to increase concentrates or to add weight gain supplements, when in fact it would be more worthwhile to take a more holistic approach by reviewing the horse's diet, health and lifestyle as a whole.

Ensure forage quality and quantity

Depending on area, pasture may be available year-round or it could be a seasonal benefit. For those that have access to year-round pasture, maintenance is key. This includes clearing the pasture of manure and weeds, mowing, fertilizing (when paddock is not in use), and perhaps reseeding to ensure an abundance of nutritious grazing which will help support your horses' diet in terms of forage and daily essentials and could allow your horse to be fed nothing but this high-quality pasture.

However, for most, grazing is an additional extra and works alongside quality hay and concentrates. Hay comes in many variations: it might be grass hay like teff and eragrostis, or legume hay such as lucerne, or even a combination. Forage can also come in the form of hay cubes/pellets and chaffs.

The amount of forage needed will largely depend on other diet components, but a general recommendation for an underweight horse would be free-access to pasture during the growing season (assuming the horse has no metabolic conditions) or free-choice hay when pasture is unavailable.

If pasture is not available and free-choice hay is not an option, 2% of body weight of hay or a combination of hay and hay products (chaffs, pellets, cubes) could be used. When using a combination, it's suggested that 1.5% of the daily amount be from long stemmed hay to maintain gut health.

When feeding for weight gain, be sure to offer a hay the horse will eat and measure how much the horse is consuming. Weighing out your hay prior to feeding will allow you to easily monitor intake. If the horse is not eating the correct amount of hay, perhaps try another type or consider adding in a hay cube to make up the full hay percentage. Avoid round-baled hay during turnout, as it's hard to know what the horse is consuming, and the horse could end up competing with other horses to get the correct amount.

Review the concentrate carefully and realistically

When looking at a suitable concentrate for a poor doer, it's wise to consider a product higher in calories. However, it's also worth considering how that energy is provided.

For example, in some concentrates the main source of energy is starch from cereal grains, such as oats, and maize. Grains usually contain about 45-50% more energy than good-quality hay, this makes them ideal for horses with elevated energy/calorie requirements.

However, for "hot" horses or those with veterinary conditions such as ulcers, colic, or tying up it's ideal to avoid higher levels of grain and so it's wise to choose a concentrate that uses an alternative energy source, such as fat and fiber. Often owners will turn to low energy feeds for hotter horses as they fear higher energy feeds will emphasise their hot temperament. The problem with this is that low energy means low calories and thus it's unlikely you will get the



improvement in weight you are looking for without having to feed huge amounts. Therefore, looking at the source of energy allows you to maintain temperament as well as calories.

When looking at how much to feed it's important to feed according to the recommendation of your chosen brand. For horses to receive the full fortification indicated they need to consume at least the minimum recommendation. Depending on the type, this could be 2-5kg per day and so it's worth chatting to a feed representative prior to embarking on a new food.

In general, concentrate feeds should not exceed 2.5kg at each feeding, and so often multiple meals will be necessary. Research has also shown that small meals improves the nutrient digestibility, and therefore for poor doers, smaller more frequent meals (4-6) should be considered. It should also be noted that during this research, hay was also fed in many small meals throughout the day and so this should be noted if your trying to increase weight.

Consider digestive support

In the performance horse there can be an increase in stress during training and/or travel which can put the horse at risk of digestive disturbances. In these instances, targeted supplementation can allow the digestive tract to work optimally.

Access to ad lib forage, specifically when combined with lucerne, can significantly reduce the likelihood of ulceration in many horses, but it is not the case for all. When faced with a hard keeper, consider an endoscopic exam to determine if the horse has gastric ulcers and could benefit from treatment.

Another thing to keep in mind is that when the small intestine becomes overwhelmed with large amounts of food, it funnels undigested feed into the hindgut, which can upset the pH of the hindgut and and disrupt the delicate balance of microbes. To keep

pH steady, keep meal sizes small and consider a suitable support element such as a hindgut buffer.

Assess the horse's management and environment

There can be many outside influences which could prevent weight gain these include but are not limited to:

- Herd/group feeding: Less dominant horses could be chased away from feeds and this could add to other stress factors.
- Adverse weather: Most often we think of cold, or wet conditions but adverse weather can occur in summer too. For example, severe storms can be stressful for some horses and even insects may become an extreme annoyance to the point of the horse spending most of its day running or pacing to get away from flies.
- Ensure horses are rugged well and given additional hay in colder weather to help keep warm without wasting calories and give a cool shady spot with free access to forage in summer.
- Don't just assume your horse is "not stressed" because he doesn't work or doesn't look stressed. Stress is not always expressed outwardly so carefully consider your horses lifestyle. For example, the death or removal of a field mate could be a huge stressor for some causing loss of weight. Ensure you are feeding by weight and not volume: When dealing with a poor doer it's important to ensure you are feeding the correct amount. So, ditch the scoop and opt for a proper scale. For example, a scoop that holds 1.2kg of cubes may only hold 600g of a meal or chaff type product.
- Also ensure staff members are correctly feeding your horse, especially on large yards with many feeds where human error can occur. It's worth checking that the correct feed and amount are given.

TESTIMONIALS

Dear Epol

I wanted to share the progress of Running shoes with you. Although there is still a way to go we are making great progress and even his sparkle has returned.

Running Shoes is 23 years old and previously he was struggling to eat the correct amount of hay and grazing per day and we knew we needed to do something to help him as the weight was dropping off.

I contacted Hannah from Epol and she come to see us recommending the Nice n Easy to help support his roughage intake. This was combined with his Epol Cool Rider cubes and in just 4 months he has gained weight and he is much more himself. Since then we have started to add in the Epol Roughage cube as well for even more roughage support. We will keep you updated on the rest of his journey.

Thank you for your help and support

Careen Roux

