

HELPING YOUR FOAL GROW WITH PROPER NUTRITION

Written by the AAEP

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A healthy foal will grow rapidly, gaining in height, weight and strength almost before your eyes. From birth to age two, a young horse can achieve 90 percent or more of its full adult size, sometimes putting on as many as three pounds per day.

Feeding young horses is a balancing act, as the nutritional start a foal gets can have a profound affect on its health and soundness for the rest of its life. At eight to ten weeks of age, mare's milk alone may not adequately meet the foal's nutritional needs, depending on the desired growth rate and owner wants for a foal. As the foal's dietary requirements shift from milk to feed and forage, your role in providing the proper nutrition gains in importance.

Following are guidelines from the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) to help you meet the young horse's nutritional needs:

1. Provide high quality roughage (hay and pasture) free choice.
2. Supplement with a high quality, properly balanced grain concentrate at weaning, or earlier if more rapid rates of gain are desired.
3. Start by feeding one percent on a foal's body weight per day (i.e., one pound of feed for each 100 pounds of body weight), or one pound of feed per month of age.
4. Weigh and adjust the feed ration based on growth and fitness. A weight tape can help you approximate a foal's size.
5. Foals have small stomachs so divide the daily ration into two to three feedings.
6. Make sure feeds contain the proper balance of vitamins, minerals, energy and protein.
7. Use a creep feeder or feed the foal separate from the mare so it can eat its own ration. Try to avoid group creep feeding situations.
8. Remove uneaten portions between feedings.
9. Do not overfeed. Overweight foals are more prone to developmental orthopedic disease (DOD).
10. Provide unlimited fresh, clean water.
11. Provide opportunity for abundant exercise.

The reward for providing excellent nutrition and conscientious care will be a healthy foal that grows into a sound and useful horse. For more information about providing proper nutrition for your foal, talk with your equine veterinarian and ask for the "Foal Growth" education brochure provided by the AAEP in conjunction with Education Partners Bayer Animal Health and Purina Mills. Additional information about foal nutrition can also be found on the AAEP's horse health website, www.myHorseMatters.com.