

Nutritional Priorities

For the Mare: Post-weaning



The high nutritional demands on your mare are now decreasing as foaling time is near and the foal is less reliant on the mare for all its nutritional needs. Hopefully you have been able to maintain an optimal nutritional regime for your mare and she is healthy and has maintained her body condition score throughout the lactation period. Weaning will be as stressful on the mare as it will be on the foal, so this is a time to continue to place a priority on the mare's health and nutritional needs.

- As weaning time approaches, it is time to start tapering down the amount of concentrates that the mare receives in her diet as the dwindling demands of lactation mean that she does not have the same high need. This should be tapered down over about 2 weeks.
- The forage based diet, along with appropriate vitamin/mineral supplements to match the forage are important to maintain as the concentrates are reduced.
- Provision of clean, palatable water throughout the day and night along with a salt block (or preferably, loose salt in a small bucket) is still an important part of nutritional management
- After a one or two week time without concentrates, you should see that the milk has dried up (i.e., lactation has stopped) and the udder is looking like it did pre-breeding. Once the foal has been weaned, continue to monitor the udder for any signs of a problem but it should dry up quickly.
- Re-assess the diet of the mare so that she stays at an optimal score. A mare that drops a lot of weight during lactation needs to be carefully assessed. If she needs to gain weight back (some mares lose a lot of weight while lactating, if the nutritional intake was not adequate to match the needs), then adjust her diet in increments by increasing the forage available and adding back concentrates only as needed (and possibly a fat supplement for mares having trouble regaining their weight), in consultation with your equine nutritionist. Keep a regular eye on the body condition score and adjust your feeding program as needed every two weeks with small adjustments at a time. This is particularly important to regain the BCS of 5 or 6 if the mare will be bred again.
- For mares that chronically get thin during pregnancy and or lactation, then are re-bred, the nutritional plane is always in a state of decline and the foal will “mine the minerals” from her each successive year. Maintaining proper BCS throughout the year, year after year, should be the priority. If not, the mare AND subsequent foals will suffer from this lack of good nutrition. Ensure that she is getting enough salt in her diet by providing loose salt in a bucket in the stall or run-in shed. Sometimes weight loss is due to dehydration, which goes along with a low sodium intake.
- If she has been an “easy keeper” and you found that she has gained weight, then do not include concentrates or high energy rations, but maintain her on a lower energy forage-based

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diet, supplemented with vitamins/minerals designed to balance the forage. Encouraging daily exercise at low to moderate levels can help regain fitness. Excess weight (beyond a BCS of 6) is not helpful.

- Providing good nutrition to the mare year round is one of the best investments you can make when you are breeding horses. A healthy mare and a healthy foal will be the result.

For more information sign up for Equine Guelph's 12 week online course on Management of the Mare, Stallion and Foal. Check the Education pages of Equine Guelph for more information.