

newsletter

JUNE 2016

BLENDING NATURE AND TECHNOLOGY



in this month's issue

1. Winter Worries
2. Cold weather colic
3. Important Notice

WINTER WORRIES



Loss of weight in winter is always a concern of many owners, therefore it is important to note that increased energy demands as a result of cold weather and the reduced nutrition of pastures generally means horses need more feed during winter than in summer months.

Even if you are feeding a top of the range ration, do not overlook the fact that winter conditions result in horses typically requiring more food (hay, grazing and concentrate feed) than usual in order to maintain body condition and workload.

All warm-blooded animals, including horses, have a critical temperature. This is the outside temperature below which a horse must produce extra heat to maintain its body temperature. This critical temperature varies, however, depending upon the horse's condition. A mature horse in good condition, where ribs cannot be seen, has a critical temperature of around 0°C during early winter. This means that any environmental temperature drop below 0°C will require the horse to produce extra heat. After developing a winter coat the critical temperature may be reduced even further to -5°C and even lower. It is estimated that young horses, horses in thinner condition, and those that have been stabled and have not developed a winter coat might only have a critical temperature of between +10°C to +5°C.

This is important to note as horses require about 15-20% more feed for each 10-15°C that the ambient temperature falls below critical temperature in order to produce the extra heat required. Thin horses, or horses with short hair, however, may need even greater increases in dietary intake to maintain normal body temperature.

As horses grow a winter coat, they allow their critical temperature to decrease, making them more comfortable at lower temperatures. Wearing blankets obviously has the same effect.

So how does this affect my feeding?

In general, temperatures in SA do not often reach really low levels so most horses will not need the 15-20% extra feed. However, horses will generally still require more food in winter than summer. Horses exposed to constant chronic cold weather acclimatise to the cold, but horses not used to cooler temperatures typically require 10 – 21 days to adapt to the altered temperature. It is often useful, thus, to adjust feeding before the cold weather sets in

Feeding extra concentrates:

As concentrates generally provide more calories per kg than roughage, this is often the first port of call for many. Although horses will require a small amount of extra hard feed to provide increased calories they will not need a vast change, unless workload has significantly increased, (usually unlikely in the colder months) or if they are pregnant, lactating or growing. In these cases, increase concentrates, however, if simply wanting to keep a horse warm, feed him more forage.

Feed more forage:

Forage is fermented in the gut where bacteria are active. Bacteria produce considerable heat that the horse can use to warm himself from the inside out, rather than having to shiver or move to stay warm.

Unfortunately, winter forage often has a reduced quality which means more hay should be provided than in summer to ensure the same calorie value. In terms of nutrient levels in forage from highest to lowest, green pasture generally tops the list followed by winter pasture, good-quality grass hay, and poor-quality grass hay.

When selecting Hay look for good quality hay that is clean and dust free. Consider feeding a higher calorie hay like Lucerne or Teff should there be a need to boost a horse's calorie intake. Choose Immature hay (characterised by soft stems and a larger portion of leaf matter) rather than overly mature (very stalky with little leaf) as this provides better nutritional value. Moreover, immature hay has a water-holding capacity that more mature hay does not have. Impaction colic can be more common in winter when horses often drink less because of cold water that is not palatable or even water that is frozen.

Consider small extras:

Keep in mind that poorer quality winter hay can also have a reduced vitamin and mineral content. It therefore may be wise to consider a Balancer product for younger and older horses to increase their levels without changing the diet hugely.

Adding extra oil to the diet can also be beneficial as it allows the increase of calories without adding large amounts of expensive concentrate feed. 250ml (1 cup) of oil has the equivalent calories of around 1-1.5kg of oats.

Remember:

You should monitor your horse's body condition year-round, but especially before harsh weather arrives. You can determine whether your horse needs extra energy by checking for decreased body weight and body condition. Make sure to feel through the heavy hair coat. Are the ribs easily felt? If so, the horse needs more energy. Is the horse shivering a lot? If so, he needs more energy! Shivering helps horses thermo-regulate, but they require energy to do so.

Also discuss your feeding program with a trusted feed advisor to avoid over feeding, which not only unbalances your pocket, but unbalances your horses ration.

Don't wait until temperatures plummet - begin your winter nutrition program early enough and give your horse sufficient time to build up the reserves he needs to see him through the winter.

Article constructed by Hannah Botha, MSc Equine Science (Royal Agricultural College, UK)

COLD WEATHER COLIC

The main cause of colic during winter is a lack of fresh, unfrozen water. Horses that aren't getting enough water are at a greater risk for conditions such as simple indigestion or impaction.

A frozen water trough is the usual dehydration culprit, but occasionally horses choose not to drink water simply because it is so cold. Therefore, keeping an eye on horses' water and refilling or adding hot water is a must during winter. Placing a small ball in the horse's bucket will help to keep the water moving and thus help to prevent freezing. Keep in mind that electrolyte supplements are not a suitable water substitute and do not mitigate the risk of dehydration. There is nothing wrong with adding (appropriate amounts of) electrolytes to a horse's diet if his workload is excessive, but offer them in a separate container leaving the main water supply clean and fresh.

The second colic risk factor associated with winter is exposure to cold temperatures. A horse with a full hair coat should have no trouble staying warm on the coldest of winter days even without a blanket as long as he remains dry and has access to shelter. Blankets are useful for horses that have been body-clipped as they have lost the added layer of insulation the hair provides, but blankets must be applied responsibly. Always replace or remove a soaked blanket immediately because the moisture will freeze, trapping the cold and causing the horse to lose precious body heat. If your horse wears a blanket, there should be at least two or three on hand so a soaked article can be traded out for a dry one.

Increasing the forage in a horse's diet will help prevent impactions and will also reduce the risk of hypothermia (low body temperature). Horses require more calories in the winter just to stay warm, and the body's fermentation process for digesting hay and roughage also generates heat that helps maintain body temperature. The best colic prevention in this situation is to allow a horse 24-hour forage access so the fermentation process never slows or stops. Adding concentrate feeds (if warranted) is fine, but they do not provide the same warming and digestive benefits as a continual forage supply.

Shelter is equally important, even to those horses that are accustomed to being outside all the time. A permanent structure built to withstand the force of strong winds and the weight of excessive snow accumulation is ideal, but temporary structures such as canvas or vinyl canopies with steel frames will also work if secured properly. For owners that don't have a barn, a garage can be a temporary substitute.

Nothing seems to function quite as well when it's really cold, and horses are no exception. Hypothermia or dehydration-induced colic episodes are common occurrences for horses living in winter climates. The good news is that with a few management and husbandry changes, these episodes should occur to a lesser degree and with far less frequency.

By Scott Leibsle, DVM - www.thehorse.com/articles/28512/cold-weather-colic



IMPORTANT NOTICE

Over the course of the remaining year we will start to replace our current Equus bags with a new design.

The first product to introduce this transformation is the Equus Safe 'n Lite.

Unfortunately our printers are delayed and there may be a break between new and old bags.

If this does occur, Equus Safe 'n Lite will be bagged in plain bags with attached Safe 'n Lite labels. The bags will still be 22.5kg at this stage.

We assure all our loyal users that the product is in no way altered, just the bag.

Please also note that on changing to the new design the Safe 'n Lite and Cool 'n Perform 15% which are currently 22.5kg, will be changing to 20kg bags. We will inform all our suppliers and clients so that new pricing can occur once this commences.

We apologise for any inconvenience caused



TESTIMONIALS



Dear Equus

Firstly, I'd like to thank Equus for such a fantastic feed. My 3 Warmbloods have been on **Equus** for just over 3 years and it's the best decision I've made!

Their coats are always shiny, they are energetic but not "stupid spooky", and I've never had a case of colic. My horses work 6 days a week, and compete as often as possible.

Two of them are in the 1.20's and my mare in the 1.10's. They each get 3kg **Equus Cool 'n Perform 12** and 600g **Equus All Time Balancer** per day.

My horses and I couldn't be happier!

Yours Sincerely

Kirsty Topham

Feeding Advice: 073 423 5491 / 083 998 6824 | Email: info.equus@driehoek.co.za or tech.equus@driehoek.co.za

For an absolutely free consultation with no further obligation contact our professional consultants to schedule a visit to your yard.

Hannah - 073 423 5491 - tech.equus@driehoek.co.za | Helen - 083 998 6824 - helen@driehoek.co.za