



Cascade Veterinary Clinic

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Feeding Soaked Grain to Geriatric Equines

Prior to beginning any specialized feeding program, your senior horse should have a thorough veterinary examination. Your horse may have an easily treatable issue such as dental disease and may not require special feeding once the issue has been addressed. Always consult your veterinary doctor before starting your horse on a specialized feeding program.

Some senior horses have such extensive dental wear, including loss of several teeth, that it becomes impossible for them to properly chew normal sources of long-stem fiber, such as hay. In these cases, it is necessary to provide a source of nutrition that does not need much, if any, chewing. Not just any source of calories and nutrients will support proper digestion, however, and feeding an incorrect diet commonly leads to colic and other serious medical problems.

The following information is based on a standard 1000lb/500kg horse.

Horses require 1.5-2% of their body weight in fibre daily. Senior horses may need up to 3% depending on the specific needs of the horse. For example, body condition, weather condition, and underlying disease can all contribute to them needing more fibre intake. The fibre needed is usually in the form of hay, but for senior horses with few remaining teeth and poor dentition, this fibre may need to be supplemented with soaked hay cubes. Horses require long stem fibre to promote hind gut fermentation, hay pellets are not a good substitute as they lack the long fibre. Locally the only source of non-hay longstem fiber is found at ACE hardware and is called Alfatech Timmothy-Alfalfa hay cubes. 1.5-2% of body weight would be 15-20lbs per day (dry not soaked weight). Alfatech cubes typically will soak down in about 2 hours. For convenience sake you can soak them for longer with beet pulp.

Beet pulp is an excellent source of fibre, and is commonly used to “stretch” out forage in the form of hay cubes for up to 50% of the dietary fibre, but can not replace the long stem fibre entirely. A 1000lb horse can have 2% of their body weight in fibre daily, so you could feed up to 10lbs of beet pulp (dry weight) along with 10lbs hay cubes to make up the total daily fibre intake your horse requires, for example. Beet pulp NEEDS to be completely soaked before feeding. Failure to soak properly may result

in a fatal choke. Typically you would add 2 parts water to 1 part beet pulp and let it soak for 12 hours and fed within 24 hours. Do not use if it spoiled or smells like vinegar.

Step 8 Hi-Fat is a complete extruded easily digestible feed that will replace the need to add oils, rice bran, selenium, brewers yeast, etc. as it is all included. It is very palatable, and soaks down nicely. A 1000lb horse can have up to 5lbs per day, but it is best to split it off into 2 feedings. You should do about 1 part Step 8 and 1-1.5 parts water to soak for 2-4 hours. We suggest starting with a smaller amount of feed to start (2.5lbs) and to slowly increase over a few weeks to get your horse to the correct amount for their body condition and weather conditions.

It is recommended to start all horses on less than half the above noted amounts and gradually increase to ensure you do not cause your horse to get diarrhea and other GI issues. If possible it is best to split the feedings off to minimum 2 times a day, preferably 3-4 if you are able (this keeps their eating routine more natural, as horses typically graze for hours at a time).

Senior horses can also benefit from adding a glucosamine supplement (available in liquid format from our clinic) to the above mixture.

If you have any questions, please call Cascade Vet Clinic at (250) 295-0312.
Your veterinary team is ready to help!