

FEEDING THE FUSSY HORSE

At some point, most horse owners will experience dealing with a fussy horse or pony. Whilst some horses are pickier, some may be more selective about when they 'go off' their feed for example, at the start of the competition season.

Providing that there are no obvious health issues such as sharp teeth, gastric ulcers, anxiety or colic signs there are several management changes that you can experiment with to try and overcome this fussy feeding behaviour.

HOW TO TACKLE FUSSY BEHAVIOUR?

Step 1:

FORAGE - Long stem forage, whether it be pasture, hay or haylage, is crucial to maintaining a healthy digestive system, and this is important to maintaining a appetite.

- Feed a minimum of 1.5% of body weight in long-stem forage per day
- Weigh your horse's forage to ensure adequate intakes are being provided
- Increase field time if your horse doesn't have regular turnout
- Feed multiple smaller hay nets or place multiple piles around the stable to avoid overfeeding your horse



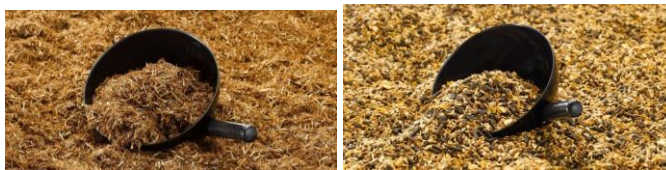
Forage satiety can occur in horses that are stabled for long periods and only provided with only one type of forage. Horses are natural browsers, therefore, offering multiple types of forage i.e. hay, haylage, dried grass, short chops, and fibre cubes can stimulate their browsing instinct and in turn increase forage intake

Step 2:

HARD FEED - Once the forage intake has been addressed and there is a requirement for a concentrate feed to be fed again there are several ideas that you can try to stimulate a appetite.

- Does your horse prefer a mix or cube?
- Are you adding chaff? Is he sorting through the chaff and leaving it behind or only eating the chaff?
- Try feeding small quantities of feed throughout the day – large meals can overfeed some horses
- Is your horse fussier in the morning or evening?

Grazing is a great appetite stimulant and some 'Dr Green' can be a great way of getting your horse's eating habits back on track. If you can't turn your horse out, why not spend time hand grazing or pick some grass and hedgerow herbage to feed in the stable which will also help to add enrichment to your horse's routine.



Step 3:

DIGESTIVE AIDS – If your horse is suffering from digestive issues and is feeling uncomfortable, this may explain why they are fussy with their feeds, particularly if fussiness is a new trait.

EquiShure™ can effectively maintain the pH of the hindgut allowing for optimal digestion of nutrients in forage, creating an environment in which dietary energy can be absorbed efficiently and increase appetite in picky eaters.

WHAT ABOUT SITUATIONAL FUSSINESS?

If your horse does not eat well when he is away at shows, try some of the following tips:

- Frequent episodes of in-hand grazing
- Offering small but frequent meals of alfalfa can help to soothe an acidic digestive system
- Feed a balancer; this will ensure intake of quality protein, vitamins & minerals and keeps meal sizes smaller
- Add molasses to sweeten a feed, or spices such as cinnamon, which aid in palatability
- Try feeding feeds dry or soaked as this can be enough to make a difference.

It is possible for some horses to 'pretend' to be fussy because they have learnt that if they eat something for a couple of days and then turn their nose up at it that they will then be given something new and tastier. This can become a vicious circle and make it extremely difficult to get the horse eating normally again. In these cases, we would recommend:

- Remove all hard feed and feed a forage only diet for a week – your horse will survive on forage alone!
- Re-introduce hard feed a handful at a time
- Once your horse clears his bowl, increase the amount of feed in his next feed and continue like this until he is clearing his bowl and being fed the recommended intake of feed



I have tried everything and still have a fussy horse...

At this point, you need to take a step back and review your horses' diet as it may be what you are feeding that is causing the problem.

- Are you adding any supplements to the feed?
- Are these completely necessary?
- Do you know why you are feeding them?
- Do they make a genuine difference to your horse?

It may be a supplement that is causing the fussy behavior. Horses are very sensitive to textures, smells, and tastes, and maybe your horse doesn't like the supplement that you are feeding. It would be a good idea to speak to a feed company at this point and find out what benefits they can offer through their feeds as this may eliminate the need for extra additions in the bucket which in turn could solve the problems you are having.

HIGHLY PALATABLE FEEDS IDEAL TO TEMPT FUSSY FEEDERS

RE-LEVE®-MIX is a high-performance mix designed for horses that react to a cereal based diet. A blackcurrant flavour is added to Re-Leve®-Mix to optimise palatability and aroma to make the ration tempting to even the fussiest of horses.

COMPETITION-FIT BALANCER is the most technically advanced feed balancer of its kind. COMPETITION-FIT-BALANCER contains added mint to enhance the palatability of the ration, and the low feeding rates make it ideal for fussy feeders.

SHAPE-UP™ is a low starch, high fibre mix designed to provide a balanced diet at low intake levels and to help maintain a normal, healthy metabolism and can be used as a calorie-controlled ration for those prone to laminitis, Equine Metabolic Syndrome or Cushing's. Cinnamon is added as it is a very powerful antioxidant and also helps to make SHAPE-UP™ extremely palatable.