

FEEDING THE PERFORMANCE HORSE

Requirements for individual horses will vary according to factors such as body weight, condition score, discipline, environmental factors, and rider ability.

However, the common factor for all performance horses is that they will train and compete under a variety of stressful conditions that can adversely affect health and performance. For these reasons there are important feeding and management strategies that can be implemented to reduce many of these problems.

Feeding management affects several different aspects of equine health and performance, including gastrointestinal function, hydration, and electrolyte status.

FORAGE

Fibre (hay, haylage and pasture) should ALWAYS form the basis of any horse's diet and a lack of fibre will increase the incidence of gastric ulcers, wood chewing, loose droppings, loss of weight and irritability. Additionally, fibre in the hindgut traps water and electrolytes and helps to combat dehydration and research shows that diets high in fibre resulted in increased water uptake.

Performance horses should receive a minimum of 1.5% of their body weight (BW) per day of forage although ideally, forage intake should be in the region of 1.5 - 2% of BW and more if you are feeding haylage.

Top Tip: Weigh your forage and any leftovers to establish what your horse's actual fibre intake is. This can often help to answer any problems related to loss of body condition or loose droppings.

FEED

For power-based exercise such as show jumping and dressage, feeds will often need to have more emphasis on providing energy from starch-based ingredients, such as cereals. For example, COMPETITION-FIT-MIX.

For stamina work such as endurance or eventing, there will be a greater reliance on digestible fibre sources, such as soya hulls and sugar beet and oil, balanced with enough cereal and starch to ensure that muscle glycogen stores remain 'topped' up. For example, ENDURO-PERFORMANCE.

Top Tip: Weigh your feed to ensure correct intakes; do not just assume that one scoop holds 1kg of feed, as this is often not the case! If you need to feed below the manufacturers recommended levels to help manage body condition use a feed balancer, for example, COMPETITION-FIT-BALANCER.

For horses that cannot tolerate high levels of starch and cereal in the diet, feeds such as RE-LEVE®-MIX or CUBES may be better suited to them. This specially formulated feed is designed to support the performance of horses that require a specialist diet such as those suffering from muscle issues or those that have experienced digestive upset such as gastric ulcers.

Concentrate feeding alone should be avoided for at least **three hours** before heavy exercise to allow for increases in blood glucose and insulin to return to baseline levels. Feeding **small amounts of forage** or limited grazing time prior to exercise will moderate body weight **and does not appear to have any other adverse effects** to performance and can in fact help to support optimal digestive health when competing.



WATER

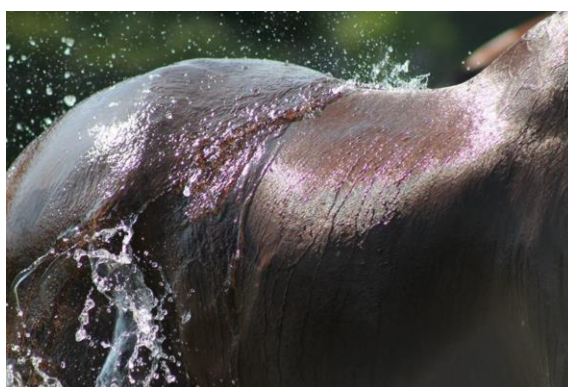
Lack of water intake will rapidly dehydrate your horse and severely effect health and performance. If your horse is reluctant to drink while travelling and competing then offering a soaked product, such as Re -Cover Mash, is advised. Re-Cover Mash Contains a blend of 'Super-Fibres', known for their superior digestibility and provision of non-heating calories, plus a source of electrolytes to aid re-hydration. The super fibres help to 'top up' the performance horse's fibre and water intake and, together with electrolytes, helps to maintain optimum hydration and thirst response.

ELECTROLYTES

Salt is the only mineral that horses have an undisputable appetite for and at least 30g of salt should be added to the feed per day. Electrolytes are a critical component of a performance horse's nutritional programme since they play an important role in maintaining osmotic pressure, fluid balance, and nerve and muscle activity. Using a slow release electrolyte supplement such as KERx Restore SR will ensure your horse is being supplied with adequate electrolyte supplementation.

It is vitally important that performance horses **begin competition with optimal levels of fluid and electrolytes** in their bodies and that these are **replaced through prolonged exercise**.

Top Tip: Electrolytes are often misused, and it is essential that horses have access to un-supplemented drinking water when administering electrolytes. If the horse refuses to drink, do not administer an electrolyte paste or supplement as this can make the horse more dehydrated



ANTIOXIDANTS

After travel muscle enzymes are often raised, which can result in muscle soreness, and stress hormone levels are also often elevated which can have a negative effect on the horse's immune function. To help combat this we suggest adding additional antioxidants such as KERx Nano-E, into the ration, which will help to maintain immune function and support the cardiovascular, circulatory, neuromuscular, and reproductive systems.

Top Tip: As compound feeds contain a good level of selenium, we would not advise adding additional selenium into the ration as horses can easily suffer from selenium toxicity.

DIGESTIVE HEALTH

Travelling and competing can mean that horses go for prolonged periods without anything to eat. This leads to a build-up in gastric acid in the stomach and increases the incidence of gastric ulcers, which will reduce performance. If gastric ulcers are a concern the use of equine digestive supplements such as KERx Rite-Trac™.

Top Tip: When travelling and competing allow your horse to regularly graze or pick at a haynet to stimulate saliva production. Alfalfa is natural antacid, so frequent bites of alfalfa -chaff will help to neutralize excess stomach, especially if fed 15 minutes before riding.