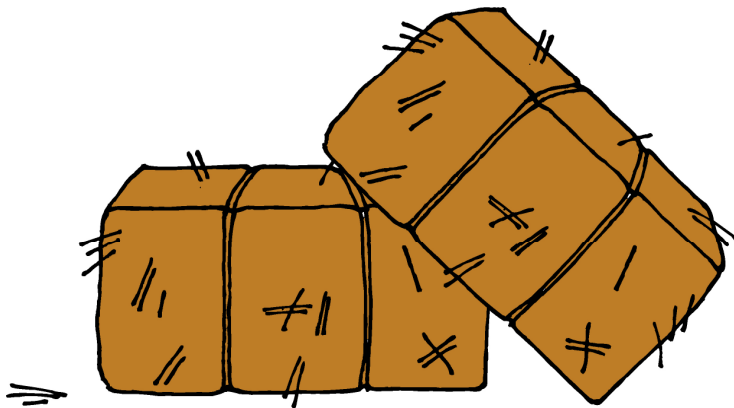
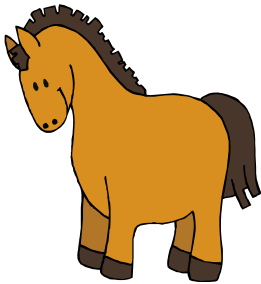




For all creatures great and small.

# FEEDING YOUR HORSE





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## Horses and Ponies Need Food

Horses have evolved as grazers, meaning they spend a long time eating large amounts of pasture during the day. Pasture or Pasture hay is essential in a horse's diet as it:

- Supplies the fibre to maintain a healthy digestive system
- Relieves boredom, preventing the development of behavioural vices
- Reduces the development of sharp edges on the horses teeth
- Helps prevent the development of stomach ulcers

Horses do not always show the clinical signs of stomach ulcers. However, if they are present, they will be causing the horse severe pain and discomfort, and if present over a prolonged period of time, they can cause peritonitis if the ulcer perforates the gut wall. Horses with ulcers may also suffer from a poor appetite and poor body condition.

During drought conditions and at the height of summer there are not many paddocks where you can keep a horse where there is pasture. Winter is also a time when grass is scarce - grass grows very slowly in cold temperatures. When pasture is limited, or non existent, a horse or pony will need to be supplied with food daily. You must assume the worst and calculate your possible feeding expenses based on your horse/pony having to be 'hand fed' every day.

If agisting, be aware that you pay a lot more for a paddock with grass, and it may actually be a cheaper alternative for you to keep you horse in a bare paddock and feed hay. If you are fortunate

enough to have your own paddock, you must realise that grass does not grow all year round! Grass grows very slowly in winter and dies off in the heat of summer.

When good quality pasture is not available, it must be replaced with good quality pasture hay. In summer, when the pasture becomes dry and stalky, feed a 'rich' hay such as clover and rye, as it is easily digestible and balances out the diet.

If you decide to feed lucerne hay, introduce it into the diet slowly, and ensure that it is always balanced out with pasture hay. Lucerne, on it's own, is not a balanced diet and can cause colic and diarrhea (it is also more expensive than other types of hay). Many people swear by lucerne hay as part of a suitable diet, and many others think it should be avoided at all costs.

A green paddock does not necessarily indicate good pasture (a lot of weeds are green!) You may need to seek advice on your pasture quantity/quality. If there is not enough pasture to sustain a horse, they will require 2-3% of their body weight in hay each day. Hence a 500 kg horse needs 10-15 kg of pasture hay daily (approximately half a bale).

Be aware that a fat horse is not necessary a healthy horse! A horse must receive the required amount of vitamins, minerals, and proteins for normal healthy cell function. They are usually present in good pasture, but will not be as available in hay as they are in fresh grass. If a commercial feed is not required to increase calorie intake, a supplement may be required to meet the necessary levels of vitamins and minerals in the diet.

The exact amount of hay will vary depending on the quality and whether or not a 'hard feed' (chaff, commercial feed and/or grain) is being fed. It also depends on the type of horse or breed, the environment in which it is kept, the activity level, and the age of the horse.

**A 'good doer' (low maintenance horse) is a term used to describe a horse that requires minimal feed, and tends to hold it's weight well.**

Small ponies such as Shetlands and Welsh Mountain Ponies are often in this category.

**A 'poor doer' (high maintenance horse) is a horse which requires good quality supplementary feeding, often resulting in an expensive diet.** Thoroughbreds tend to fall into this category.

**Most horses will be somewhere in the middle, surviving well off a mix of pasture, hay and hard feeds (grain and chaff) in the winter or when in work.**

If feeding commercial feeds, it is easier and cheaper to stick to a mix or pellet style feed. This ensures that the feed meets all the nutritional requirements for a horse. There are feeds available for every type of horse in every type of situation! From dieting ponies, mares in foal, race horses, growing horses, and of course the weekend riding horses. Do your research and find a feed that is *designed* for the type of horse or pony that you have and for the riding you are participating in.

Mixing and feeding grains can be dangerous. It is very easy to cause severe nutritional imbalances, affecting performance, weight, and behaviour. Feeding grains is often more expensive than feeding commercial feeds and requires a more detailed knowledge of nutritional requirements.

When introducing a hard feed into the diet, ensure it is done slowly to minimise the risk of colic. Commercial feed bags will usually have a recommended amount to feed and at what speed to introduce it into the diet (often over 5-7 days). This is especially important if the horse needs to put on weight or has not been hard fed before.

It is essential for a horse to have access to a mineral lick, especially when the diet consists of only hay and/or grass. You may think it's cute when you walk into your horse's paddock and they come up to you and start licking your skin, but it is a clear sign that your horse needs salt *now!* Salt can be fed in a hard fed at the rate of ½-1 teaspoon a day (more in summer if the horse is in work) but it is safer to allow the horse to adjust their own intake of salt through a mineral lick or salt lick.

If you would like more information on feeding your horse, there are a number of books on the market. However, be careful to select books that are designed for Australian horses and conditions.

- Dr. John Kohnke is a well-respected Australian vet who has invested a lot of time into researching the horses' digestive system. He has written several books, including *Feeding and Nutrition of Horses*, *The Makings of a Champion*, and *Feeding Horses in Australia*.
- There is a program called *Feed XL* that assists you in balancing your horse's diet. Visit <http://feedxl.com/>
- Department of Primary Industries website contains information on feeding and nutrition of horses, pasture for horses and grazing management. Visit [www.dpi.vic.gov.au/farming/horses](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/farming/horses)

## REMEMBER:

- Introduce new feeds to a horse's diet slowly and follow feeding recommendations.
- Seek professional advice (such as that of a vet or a feed company representative) before adding new feeds or supplements/additives. Company nutritionalists are usually more than happy to discuss your horse's diet with you over the phone. A program like FeedXL is written by vets and equine nutritionalists and is unbiased as to what feeds may be suitable.
- An unbalanced diet will lead to an unhealthy horse, regardless of whether the horse is thin or fat.
- Ensure your horse has access to a mineral block at all times.
- Feed your horse by *weight* and not by *volume*.
- Feed small meals as often as possible. Horses are grazers and eat little amounts all day long. A horse with no pasture must be fed at least twice a day, once a day is not sufficient. If the horse can not be tended to more than once a day, consider supplying the horse with a round roll of hay so that they can have free access to it at all times, just like they would if they had pasture to graze on.
- If your horse requires weight gain, rule out any dental issues by getting the teeth checked and ensure worming is up-to-date so your horse can obtain the full benefit of the feed.
- If your horse does not lose or gain weight regardless of diet, consult a vet for an underlying cause.

## FEED COSTS

**As of Summer 2007-08 (Victorian prices, N.B. prices may vary in other states)**

**(drought has increased feed prices over the last 2 years)**

Small bale pasture hay \$20.00 (approximate weight 20kg)

Small bale clover/rye hay \$23.00 (approximate weight 20kg)

Small bale lucerne hay \$35.00 (approximate weight 25kg)

Bag of chaff \$35.00 (average weight 25kg)

Bag of commercial feed \$25.00 - \$40.00 (average weight 20kg)

- ◆ Prices will drop again, but they will never be as low as in the past.
- ◆ Remember that a drought is experienced every 2-5 years in Victoria and NSW, pushing prices up *every few years*.
- ◆ To save on feed costs, work with other horse owners to purchase hay in bulk. You will often be able to purchase truck loads of hay (upwards of 100 bales) for a lot less than at a feed store, so cut out the middle man! Remember, you must have a clean, dry area to keep your hay, if it gets wet it will go mouldy and you will be unable to feed it to your horse. If hay fades from exposure to the sun, such as when stored in an open shed, the nutrient level will drop, downgrading the quality of the hay.

## **Examples of Diets different horses – different scenarios**

Remember that the total cost is for feed only, not agistment or any other expenses.

### ***Horse One: GUS***

Welsh Mountain Pony (good doer)  
Ideal weight 275kg  
Middle age  
Not ridden  
No pasture in paddock  
Access to mineral lick  
Fed twice a day

#### **Morning Feed:**

2.5kg pasture hay

#### **Evening Feed:**

2kg pasture hay  
500g lucerne chaff  
500g commercial feed (soya bean meal)  
30g vitamin & mineral supplement (Kohnke's Own Cell-Vital)

This diet ensures Gus has the correct amount of roughage, protein and carbohydrates. Because Gus is on a limited diet due to his ability to put on weight too quickly, he is fed a vitamin and mineral supplement to ensure he doesn't lack any essential parts of the diet.

**TOTAL COST:**      \$43.00 Week      \$172.00 Month

***Horse Two: JOCK***

Thoroughbred (poor doer)  
Ideal weight 500kg  
Very old horse (no teeth)  
Retired (not ridden)  
Minimal pasture in paddock (pick only)  
Access to mineral lick  
Fed twice a day

Morning Feed:

1kg pure clover hay  
2kg lucerne chaff  
2kg commercial feed (Mitavite Gumnuts)

Evening Feed:

2kg lucerne chaff  
1kg oaten chaff  
4kg commercial feed (Mitavite Gumnuts)

Jock is unable to eat much hay due to a lack of teeth, so he is fed large amounts of chaff for roughage and commercial feed for calories, that is wet down to form a 'porridge like mash.' A vitamin and mineral supplement is not required as Jock is consuming large amounts of commercial feed which contains the full requirements.

**TOTAL COST:**      \$143.00 Week      \$575.00 Month

***Horse Three: JIMMY***

Thoroughbred (poor doer)

Ideal weight 700kg

Young horse

Not ridden

Pasture in paddock, approximately 1-3cm in length

Fed twice a day

Access to mineral lick

Morning Feed:

1kg clover/rye hay

Evening Feed:

2kg pasture hay

1kg lucerne hay

500g oaten chaff

1kg commercial feed (Mitavite Economix)

The short length of grass in the paddock supplies Jimmy with about half of his daily requirements. The rest is supplemented with good quality hay a small amount of commercial feed. This diet ensures that Jimmy gets the right amount of carbohydrates, lysine (protein), vitamins, and minerals

**TOTAL COST:**      \$47.00 Week      \$189.00 Month

***Horse Four: CLANCY***

Anglo Arab x Fjord (good doer)

Ideal weight 450kg

Middle aged

Ridden daily (light work)

No pasture in paddock

Fed twice a day

Access to mineral lick

Morning Feed:

4kg pasture hay

Evening Feed:

3kg pasture hay

1kg lucerne chaff

1kg commercial feed (Mitavite Economix)

30g vitamin & mineral supplement (Kohnke's Own Cell-Vital)

Clancy is on commercial feed as he is in work and his body requires more than if he was maintaining weight alone. Without the commercial feed, he would require twice the amount of supplements.

As Clancy is a good doer, he may require less commercial feed if the digestible energy and quality of the hay were higher, such as that of clover and rye or lucerne.

**TOTAL COST:**        \$65.00 Week            \$258.00 Month

***Horse Five: TUCKY***

Standardbred (average doer)

Ideal weight 450kg

Older horse, but has a healthy mouth with no teeth loss

Ridden on weekends by children

Pasture in paddock, approximately 3-8cm in length

Fed once a day

Access to mineral lick

Morning Feed:

1kg lucerne chaff

1kg commercial feed (Mitavite Gumnuts)

When ridden:

Extra 500g commercial feed

Tucky does not require a supplement while there is grass in the paddock, the mineral lick and commercial feed will meet any deficiencies that may be present, as it can be assumed they'll be minimal.

As Tucky gets older, he will lose the ability to draw nutrients from hay and then the amount of commercial feed will need to be increased as grass diminishes. It can be estimated that over the next five years, Tucky will slowly change diets until he is on a very similar diet to Jock (Horse Two). So while 'cheap' to feed when there is grass in the paddock, Tucky will soon cost a lot more to feed. This is something the owner of an older horse must be prepared for.

**TOTAL COST:**      \$22.00 Week      \$89.00 Month