

feeding the orphan or rejected foal



Colostrum

Colostrum is the first milk produced by the mare after foaling which contains antibodies that the foal needs to develop immunity against disease. The foal is only able to absorb the antibodies in the milk for the first 24 to 36 hours of life and doesn't start making his own until approximately 7 to 8 weeks of age. It is vital, therefore, that the foal consumes sufficient colostrum to protect it for the first few months of life and, as a guide, approximately 1.5 litres of colostrum should be consumed within 24 hours.

Although it may be a distressing task, taking colostrum from the dead mare as soon as you can could help to keep the foal alive. Your vet should be able to advise on the best course of action. Many studs collect and freeze colostrum to have on hand in case of such an emergency – your vet may know of one local to you with sufficient supplies. Alternatively he may recommend powdered colostrum or the administration of plasma. Remember, if you are able to obtain some frozen colostrum NEVER heat it to de-frost it as this will render the antibodies useless.

Introduction to Mare's Milk Replacer

Once the colostrum has been fed, the foal can be introduced to Mare's Milk Replacer. Initially it may be fed slightly warm to encourage consumption and it may be necessary to feed from a baby's bottle or a bottle with a teat designed for lambs or calves (the teat used should have an opening that is at least 13mm (1/2 inch) wide). Although a foal cannot be expected to drink from a bucket within the first 1 to 3 hours of separation from the dam, there is no need to continue bottle-feeding and the foal can be easily taught to drink from a bucket.

Teaching the foal to drink from the bucket has many advantages over bottle-feeding as the foal can drink when he chooses and is more likely to consume small quantities at frequent intervals as he would if suckling from the mare. This should help to reduce digestive upsets, improve growth and development and reduce the development of a "pot-belly" that can often occur when bottle-feeding. This approach is much less time-consuming for the

owner and encourages the development of a more "normal" relationship between the foal and humans in as much as a human is not seen as the direct source of food.

The sooner you introduce the bucket to the foal the more quickly and easily he is likely to learn to drink from it. Place your fingers in the foal's mouth and when the foal starts to suck lift a bucket containing Mare's Milk Replacer up to the foal's muzzle. Slowly remove your fingers so that the foal is drinking the milk. If the foal stops repeat the process until he is drinking confidently on his own. Never force the foal's head down to a bucket, always bring the bucket to the foal.

Once the foal is confident drinking from the bucket a 12 hour supply can be prepared and left with the foal. The bucket should be hung on a wall to help keep the milk clean as should a further bucket with fresh, clean water. It is advisable to use buckets that contrast in colour to the wall that they are hung on, as the young foal can only distinguish between light and dark.

How much will your foal need?

It is important to start feeding the foal slowly and increase the amount fed each day gradually. Milk production from the mare is linked to bodyweight with ponies producing up to 5 litres of milk per 100kgs bodyweight and horses approximately 3 litres per 100kgs bodyweight. The quantity of Mare's Milk Replacer to give the foal is determined by the mare's bodyweight. Starting quantities are given in the table below which should be increased gradually over approximately 11 days to reach the suggested maintenance level. The amount given should not be increased by more than 1.75 litres per day to reduce the risk of digestive upsets. Loose droppings may indicate that the volume of Mare's Milk Replacer being fed is being increased too quickly and so increases should be made more gradually.

If the foal will not consume the suggested amount then increase the concentration of the mixture. For example, if the foal will only consume half the recommended levels then increase the strength of the mixture by using twice the amount of powder.



Feeding Recommendations (per day)

Feed Mare's Milk Replacer at 'Start' level to begin with, working up to the 'Maintenance' level over 10-14 days

Mare's Bodyweight		Mare's Milk Replacer START LEVEL		Mare's Milk Replacer MAINTENANCE LEVEL	
kg	lbs	litres	pints	litres	pints
115	250	1.75	3.3	3.8	6.6
227	500	3.8	6.7	7.6	13.4
340	750	5.7	10	11.4	20
454	1000	7.6	13.4	15.2	26.75
568	1250	9.5	16.6	18.9	33.25
680	1500	11.4	20	22.7	40
910	2000	15.2	26.7	30.3	53.35

Water in litres		Mare's Milk Replacer powder		
litres	pints	cup*	kg	lbs
3.75	6.6	2	0.45	1
7.5	13.25	4	0.9	2
15	26.5	8	1.8	4

*Enclosed cup holds 225g of Mare's Milk Replacer

For foals that are top-heavy, showing signs of developmental problems or growing rapidly, Baileys Foal Assist is available. Please contact us for specific individual advice on how to integrate this product into your orphan foal's diet.

At 3 months the foal's digestive tract begins to change from being totally dependent on milk to being able to digest forage and grain more efficiently. At three months a stud ration can be introduced to the foal. The feed that is most appropriate will be determined by the foal's condition. Baileys No.7 Stud Mix or No.3 Stud Cubes can be used for foals that are underweight whereas Stud Balancer is suitable for foals that are over weight.

Monitoring your foal's development

Research has shown that orphan foals brought up on Mare's Milk Replacer grow to a normal height and weight compared with non-orphan foals, showing no significant difference in wither or hip height. If you want to monitor your foal's development we have easy to use weight tapes and Growth Monitoring Charts available that illustrate your foal's rate of growth. This allows us to make changes to the diet to maintain a consistent rate of growth if necessary which should help to avoid developmental problems.

Managing the orphan foal

A dry, clean, warm environment is essential for the foal in the early stages but as it gets stronger, the foal should have access to a small paddock for exercise. Hand rearing can clearly lead to problems with the foal identifying more with humans than with horses. Providing an animal companion for the orphan foal, such as another orphan, goat or quiet pony or horse, will help the foal to develop normal behaviour and not become too humanised. If the foal was part of a group of mares and foals before the dam died then it may be possible to turn the foal out with the group, although this will depend on the nature and temperament of the other mares. Should the foal try to suckle from another mare he may be injured if the mare reacts aggressively. Always discuss your foal's requirements with your Vet. As the foal gets older he can join other weanlings in a group and over time is likely to develop normal behaviour patterns.

Introducing concentrates

Once the foal is drinking all of the milk between feeding times, a handful of Baileys Foal Creep Pellets can be put in the empty milk bucket. Foal Creep Pellets are a milk-based creep pellet that provides a balanced source of all the nutrients the young foal requires. If not eaten before the next feeding time, it should be discarded but, once the foal has learned to eat the Foal Creep Pellets, it should be provided in a separate hanging bucket so that the foal has free access to this as well as Mare's Milk Replacer. At 6 weeks of age the amount of Mare's Milk Replacer can be reduced and Foal Creep Pellets can be increased.

Age of foal	Mare's Milk Replacer Litres / day	Foal Creep Pellets kg per day
6 weeks	19	0.55
7 weeks	15	1.1
8 weeks	11	1.64
9 weeks	7.5	2.2
10 weeks	3.8	2.73

For every 4 litres of Mare's Milk Replacer removed from the ration, 0.5kg (1.1lbs) of Foal Creep Pellets should be consumed as illustrated in the table left which is for a foal from a 568kg mare.

We're here to help...

Baileys' "rescue tub" of 6kg of Baileys Mare's Milk Replacer should last the average new born Thoroughbred foal four days and can be dispatched on a next day service courier in an emergency. That gives you enough time to arrange with Baileys for delivery of further, longer term, supplies to the most appropriate destination. As well as the 6kg tub, Mare's Milk Replacer is available in 20kg sacks.

For further information or help and advice contact one of Baileys Nutrition team on 01371 850 247 (option 2)
e: nutriiton@baileyshorsefeeds.co.uk
www.baileyshorsefeeds.co.uk