



Should you change what you feed just because your horse is getting on a bit?



# older & wiser



## When is a horse old?

We all age at different rates according to our lifestyle, diet, exercise and of course genetics and it's the same for horses and ponies. Just like humans, horses are living longer as research improves our understanding, with careful management enabling horses to lead active lives late into their twenties.

The most common problem that we as owners often face is deciding when our horses are "old" and when, or if, they require a diet designed specifically for the older horse. Feeding a horse a "veteran" feed just because he is about to have his 18th birthday may not be the most suitable option so the main thing to remember is to treat your horse as an individual, just as you would a younger horse.

However, many factors influence the longevity of a horse's life including its breeding, the stresses and strains placed on it in earlier years and the standard of care. Nutrition is an important factor that influences the health and welfare of a horse of any age. It is important to be aware of some of the effects of old age in order to establish which feed will meet a particular individual's requirements.

If your older horse or pony has a history

of problems such as laminitis, Cushing's (PPID) or tying-up, this can limit your feeding options. Ideally, the starch content of the diet should be as low as possible which generally means the avoidance of mixes and cubes, however, the severity of these conditions can vary hugely so each horse should be considered individually. If you would like to discuss some options for your horse or pony, contact our Nutritional team by telephone or email.

## THE EFFECTS OF OLD AGE Dentition

Loss of teeth or poor tooth condition is a common problem in older horses. This can affect their ability to chew, which could result in partially digested food causing blockages in the gut. As with any horse, be sure to have your horse's teeth checked regularly to identify any

problems. Common signs of dental problems include quidding, where food is dropped out of the mouth, and balled up bits of hay or haylage that have been spat out.

If he has difficulty chewing forage, you may wish to consider using higher quantities of shorter fibres in the diet, like Light Chaff. For those horses with very few teeth left, Fibre-Beet is ideal as it is fed soaked so requires minimal chewing. Fibre is particularly crucial during the winter months as it can add calories and aid in heat production for warmth. As a general rule, most cubes will soften easily in water and, as such, be easier to eat and preferable to a mix.

## Efficiency of the Digestive System

As horses get older they become less efficient at absorbing nutrients from their feed and this may be worsened as a result of worm damage. They may also find it harder to digest fibre, as the fibre-digesting micro-organisms in the hindgut may become less efficient, so it's important to make sure your older horse or pony has



plenty of fibre in the diet to help them maintain digestive health and efficient utilisation of nutrients. Additionally, older horses may benefit from a feed containing a digestive enhancer, like Senior Mix or Lo-Cal balancer.

### Diarrhoea

Older horses and ponies are more susceptible to disruptions to the digestive tract so avoid any sudden changes to either the forage or concentrate ration as well as sudden increases or decreases in turnout time. A horse susceptible to diarrhoea should always get plenty of fibre and a prebiotic, like Baileys Digest Plus, is useful to support beneficial bacteria in the gut and aid digestive health.

### Weight Loss

Horses and ponies are often less able to maintain their condition as they get older, which can be a result of the problems described above. There are a number of factors to consider when trying to improve weight gain and condition. If a horse has a history of problems, such as laminitis or Cushing's (PPID), a traditional high starch conditioning feed is unlikely to be suitable.

Instead, products such as Alfalfa Plus

Oil, Speedi-Beet, Fibre-Beet and Keep Calm may be more suitable as they can improve condition whilst remaining high fibre and low starch. If your older horse or pony is in higher levels of work and has no history of any nutritional or clinical problems, then Top Line Conditioning Cubes are highly digestible and contain good quality protein to promote condition.

### Weight Control/Overweight Equines

One of the most common feeding strategies employed by owners of overweight horses and ponies is to make significant reductions to the diet but it's important to make sure that the horse still receives a balanced diet and the essential vitamins and minerals they require. Lo-Cal Balancer, when fed at recommended amounts alongside forage, provides an optimum nutrient intake in a low calorie ration. For the older horse in particular, it is important to maintain a fibre intake and Light Chaff is ideal fed with Lo-Cal, whilst hay may be soaked prior to feeding to further reduce calorie intake.

### So when would I use Senior Mix?

As the horse ages, the potential reduction in digestive efficiency may mean that a horse that has previously looked good

## Management tips

- Older horses will become less dominant and may be bullied away from food and shelter by younger horses. Ensure older horses have the opportunity to finish their feed and can escape the elements.
- The older horse may become quite fussy. Use feeds with added herbs for improved palatability, particularly if the horse has any medication. If softening the feed, use warm water to aid palatability.
- Implement the rules of feeding as extensively as possible by feeding small meals at frequent intervals to keep the horse interested support digestive efficiency.
- Implement an effective de-worming programme and have teeth checked regularly by a professional.
- Monitor any changes in your horse's droppings. For example, large fibre strands in the droppings could indicate a reduction in digestive efficiency.

on a high fibre, low energy feed, such as a "pasture mix", may begin to lose condition and require a little bit extra from its regular diet. This will not occur at any set time but, if it does, changing to Senior Mix may be beneficial.

This mix includes Digest Plus prebiotic, to allow for increased nutrient digestibility, and the oil and fibre levels of the feed provide sufficient energy to support light to moderate work. Added garlic provides a tempting aroma and helps mask the presence of any medicines a horse may be receiving but, remember, Senior Mix is unlikely to be suitable for those horses who require a starch-controlled diet.



For further information or a practical and individual diet for your horse, contact one of Baileys Nutrition team on 01371 850 247 (option 2)  
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