

Equine Feeding

General Equine Feeding Recommendations

By Jessica Lynn

Good equine nutrition is more than just throwing your horse a flake of hay twice per day! It is also more than just giving your horse two flakes of alfalfa a day, because "that is how they have always been fed". It has become more of a science, with hay being tested for all the necessary nutrients, sugars, carbs, and more, a nutritional program being designed and put together for the best health of your horse.

There are many factors to consider when feeding horses, with hay being just one of them. However, depending upon your horse and any health challenges he may currently have, hay can be one of the most important factors in maintaining his health. As more and more of our horses are becoming Insulin Resistant (IR) or metabolically challenged, are being diagnosed with Equine Polysaccharide Storage Myopathy (EPSM) or with Cushings, we must, as horse care takers, become more aware, as well as knowledgeable, of not only the protein content of the hay we feed, but also the sugar content and NSC (non-soluble carbohydrates), along with other nutrients and minerals, or lack thereof.

One of the most comprehensive sites for information regarding hay, especially for someone with a horse who has laminitis or has foundered, is www.saferhay.org it is worth the time to go through all the articles on that site and become an educated horse owner when it comes to hay. For pelleted, complete, or concentrated feed go to <http://www.balancedequinenutrition.com/NSCinFeeds.pdf>, there you will be able to determine the NSC value for the bag feed you may be using, as well as grains and even for carrots, it really is an education to see what in the way of sugar is in our horses feed stuffs!

Following are a couple general rules of thumb when it comes to feeding hay, for horses who are not health challenged, which everyone seems to agree on for the most part, and are as follows:

The starting point is to feed a minimum of 1.5 to 2 lbs. of hay, per 100 lbs weight of the horse, or 1,000 lb horse = 15 – 20lb's of hay. This would be for a horse that was in light or no work. However, for horses in training, doing "heavy work", or for high performance and competition horses, hay can be increased by up to 3 lbs. per 100 lbs. of weight to handle their particular needs. Hay also needs to be tested to find out the balance of protein, sugars, and various minerals, what may be lacking, and also what you may need to add to have a complete balanced feed ration for optimal equine health.

So, for a reasonably active horse, used a minimum of 3–4 times per week, on long trail rides or lots of arena work, it would be about 2 to 2.5 lbs of hay per 100lbs, or approximately 20–25 lbs of hay per day for a 1,000 lb horse.

I personally like to follow the "one third rule" which I learned from my vet, Dr. Mat Matthew's, years ago. That rule is to feed three different types of hay per day, one-third in weight of each type, not only for variety but to try to meet nutritional requirements as well.

For Example, a horse fed 21 lbs. of hay per day would get: 7 lbs. of either forage or Bermuda, with 7 lbs of orchard grass, timothy, or grass mix, some horses can tolerate a small amount of alfalfa, but I do not advocate feeding alfalfa as a "main course", what is most important is in finding the balance of the hays to help balance nutrients including the calcium/ phosphorus ratio. Those hays should be varied

and changed on occasion, using timothy, bermuda, orchard or a mixed grass hay as the "main course" hays, which I prefer. The 21lbs would be divided into two or three daily feedings. Although my horses are fed Timothy in the morning, free fed bermuda all day, and at the evening feeding they get an organic grass mix hay, it does contain a minute amount of alfalfa in the second and third cutting of that hay.

However, most horses need other supplementation, a minimum of once per day, including vitamins, organic trace minerals, along with a concentrated probiotic/digestive enzyme (especially if you vaccinate and use chemical wormers) so that they are able to absorb and assimilate all they are getting, and for some they may need a little added fat due to metabolic disorders.

Because a lot of people do not have time to mix and measure, I recommend a balanced vitamin and minerals supplement that is suited to the type of hay you feed, one with zinc, copper and vitamin E. Most concentrated feeds these days have become more balanced, however, as a horse owner you really need to do your research, find out what the NSC's are in what you do choose to feed, and keep them to a minimum. Some of the most popular concentrated feeds have upwards of 30–40% sugar in them, no wonder the horses gobble it down! The best site to find out the sugar and starch to these kinds of feeds is [Balanced Equine Nutritionn](#), go to their site and find out what you are really feeding your horse in his grain ration, you may be shocked!

I am also a big fan of using anthelmintic herbs for horses, and many of our "Zyme" blends contain wild crafted and organic herbs that support various systems in the horse's body, and provide extra naturally occurring vitamins and nutrients, some even contain anti-inflammatory compounds. For a list of the herbs in each product you can go to the [Articles Buttonn](#), and scroll to the bottom to Herbal & Supplements Glossary.

Feeding Recommendations for Light Work:

For Horses who are only used or ridden occasionally, or for the older, more senior horse: feed approximately 15–20 lbs of hay per day using the 1/3rd ea. rule:

Bermuda, forage, orchard grass, timothy or orchard grass mix, very little (1–2 lbs,) or no alfalfa.

A concentrated feed/ grain, one time per day, designed for what your horse is used for, however, you must read the labels, find out the sugar, starch and NSC values, and what else may be in the feed; to this add either Pro-Zyme or more importantly Senior-Zyme for the older horses – feed it daily, year round, along with 1 cup of Stabilized rice bran, and about 1/3 cup flax seed or flax meal for the Omega (Essential Fatty Acids) to increase stamina.

For horses who are used on a regular but light schedule, and are in good physical shape, or 2 & 3 year olds:

You would feed approximately

20–22 lbs of hay per day using the 1/3rd ea. rule:

Bermuda, forage, orchard grass, timothy or grass mix, a small amount of Oregon or Northern Nevada alfalfa, or for other parts of the country an alfalfa that is green, moist and leafy, with lots of purple blooms to it, not from Imperial Valley or areas known to have over use of chemical fertilizers or insecticides.

For working horses, i.e. cutters, reiner's, roper's, or ranch horses: feed on average 24–28 lbs of hay per day, using the 1/3rd ea rule:

Timothy, forage, and either orchard grass, a rich grass mix, or grass mix with alfalfa. A concentrated feed for performance horses with a little more fat to it, one time per day, with added supplements for working horses, 1 cup of rice bran, 1/3 cup flax meal and 1 cup of "Race Horse Oats" (aka re-cleaned oats) soaked in 1-cup of water. It is particularly useful that these horses also receive 20 grams per day of Joint-Zyme as well as Missing Link or as an alternative they could be fed Missing Link and Super-Joint-Zyme Formula which contains higher amounts of Glucosamine, MSM and naturally occurring Biotin, as well as natural herbal anti-inflammatory compounds to help keep them healthy and sound. Add water to the consistency your horse enjoys.

Breeding Mares: A variety of hays should be free fed, especially if the mare is in foal. Mares who tend to gain weight easily should be fed hay by weight, again using the 1/3rd ea. rule, with the emphasis being on the highest quality hay available, and at the rate of approximately 22–24 lbs per day, especially important during the last three months of the pregnancy. I usually supplement the hay with a good mare and foal "concentrated sweet feed" one low in NSC (starch and sugars) and one cup of stabilized rice bran, 1 cup of "Race Horse Oats" soaked in 2 cups water, then drained, along with Missing Link, Atlantic Kelp Powder or Source, and Mare N'Waiting-Zyme. I have found this to be a good combination for robust and healthy foals, as well as mares who stay healthy and sound.

Open Mares: For Mares who are not in foal I recommend a variety of hay using the 1/3rd ea. rule or pasture grazing, feeding hay per the horses weight. I also recommend a 20-gram scoop of Mare-Zyme per day during Spring and Summer, along with Missing Link and Atlantic Kelp Powder or Source. However, once a mare is found to be in foal then I usually switch them to Mare N'Waiting Zyme for the duration of the pregnancy, Mare N'Waiting Zyme is fed at the rate one 20 gram scoop per day, and contains a blend of herbs that have naturally occurring nutrients as well as vitamins.

Foals & Weanlings: Foals and Weanlings should be free fed hay along with their mothers for optimal growth. They should also be fed a concentrated feed especially designed for them, along with a small amount of rice bran (1/4 to 1/2 cup), Missing Link, Source or Atlantic Kelp and Foal-Zyme.

Foal-Zyme was designed to assist the growing foal to assimilate all of the nutrition from its feed as well as to help prevent epithisitis, which is a terrible tragedy that befalls many breeders. Foal-Zyme helps the foal to absorb as well as utilize the calcium and phosphorus from their diet and keep the balance in check and can help prevent scours. For Foal-Zyme we use a base of Pro-Zyme where we added specially selected wild crafted herbs that are known to be beneficial to the growing foal, and to boost its immune system.

Foundered & Laminitic Horses, or Horses with IR or EPSM:

No molasses, no sweet feeds, no carrots, no treats of any kind and no sweet grain feeds. Your horse may be able to tolerate a small amount of soaked whole oats, but you will need to speak to a nutritionist or vet about this and the amount that you can feed your individual horse. Most of your horses hay should be soaked, especially if you do not have a consistent source of hay that you can have tested and have an analysis performed on. Have your hay tested to find out what amount of sugar and starch may be in the hay. Balance the minerals and vitamins from the testing.

For any concentrated, sweet feeds or pellets there is a site that lists the NSC (starch and sugar) of those feeds. That site is [Balanced Equine Nutrition](#). They have a table of all of the values for most of the major brands, they also list carrots, oats, barley, and other feed stuff.

What I personally feed to my own horses, with one who is suspected of having Insulin Resistance or possibly EPSM and one who is showing signs of IR is the following:

Mornings: 1 large flake of bermuda grass soaked for at least one hour to remove excess sugar and potassium, and drained. Or if you have had your hay tested and the NSC is under 10% no soaking is necessary.

Free feed Bermuda all day (the Bermuda I had tested is only 7% sugar and 16% protein)..

Evening: For my young horse with a possible metabolic disorder, she gets another large flake of Bermuda grass, topped with about 2 pounds of a grass mixed hay.

My mare gets 1 large flake of a "mixed organic hay". The hay I purchase is grown specifically for horses, is premium quality, it is "put up right", and barn stored until delivered. This particular rancher has won numerous awards for his "horse hay" at State Fairs. His first cutting of the year is right around mid-June or Father's depending on how the weather is for the year. He does not use any pesticides, insecticides, or herbicides on his fields. If you look you can probably find something comparable in your area of the country. I have had this hay analysed and I add just a 1/2 oz of calcium carbonate and a 1/4 oz of Dolomite powder to her goolosh to balance it for her.

I also feed, once per day, The Earth Song Ranch "Goolosh" which is different for each of my horses.

My young metabolically challenged horse gets two times per day: 1 c. stabilized rice bran, 1/3 cup flax seed, 1/2 cup whole oats, 1/4 sunflower seeds, 1 full scoop of Source, 1/3 c Missing Link, 1 tsp. cinnamon powder, 2 tsp Vitamin E oil for equines stabilized in Coca-Soya oil, 2 oz. of Coca-Soya oil, 1 20 gram scoop Pro-Zyme, a handful of mixed herbs, a Uckele supplement called Glycocemic GQ for horses with Insulin Resistance; she also gets 1 oz of Calcium carbonate, and a zinc/copper supplement to balance her hay ration. In the morning goolosh she receives 1 10 gram scoop of Colostrum and 1 teaspoon of Beta 1,3 1,6 D Glucan.

My mare does not have a metabolic problem, therefore she gets 1 cup of whole oats (sometimes called Race Horse Oats, or Re-Cleaned oats, usually soaked in 2 cups of water for a couple of hours- then drained) 1 c. of stabilized rice bran, 1/3 cup whole flax seed, 2 oz of Coca-Soya oil, with 1/3 cup Missing Link, along with 1-10 grams scoop of Prozyme, with one full scoop of Source which is rich in micro-nutrients, and is particularly important, especially for mares, as it supports thyroid function, she also gets 1 tsp Vitamin E oil for equines, in the morning she also receives a 1-10 gram scoop of colostrum.

For anyone living in the South West (California, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, Oregon, Idaho, et al) I also recommend some Selenium supplementation with Vitamin E, as a lot of the hay growing areas are deficient in Selenium, and to also look at Copper as well as Zinc as possibly needing supplementation.

However, during the spring and early summer months, I usually substitute Mare-Zyme for my mares, in place of Pro-Zyme, as it has all of the anthelmintic herbs that help to support, balance and calm

cycling mares. The Mare-Zyme blend has been shown to make mares less moody and spooky, and a little more mellow. It also supports their hormonal and endocrine systems naturally with wild crafted herbs that if they were in the wild they would most likely seek them out themselves.

Several times per week I feed my horses a combination of other supportive herbs, some in their natural leaf form, some in powder form, which I personally blend for them, some are for Kidney and some for Liver.

During my mare, Echo's, pregnancy, in the last tri-mester I fed her Red Raspberry leaves, Red Clover Flowers, and Chamomile flowers along with Dandelion Leaf and increased the amount of Red Raspberry Leaf as she got closer to foaling. Her filly, Destinee Rose, was healthy and robust, she was up and running around at about 15 minutes of age!

Several of our products do combine Pro-Zyme with specific herbs designed for certain ages of horses, i.e. mares, mare's who are in foal, foals, and one for the senior horse as maintenance and support products.

Because of the various soil conditions, especially in the area in which we live, as well as the fact that much of the hay coming from the Imperial Valley area of So. California, is sandy or very dusty, it is recommended that once per month, one time per day, for 3-5 days, you feed your horse(s) one cup of Psyllium (mixed with water, not dry). I have found that it is best to mix Psyllium in rice bran, a little Omelene (or concentrated feed of choice) with some soaked oats and enough water to make it sloppy. As those of us in So. California know there is a problem with sand colic as well as entroliths forming due to the nature of the soils in which the hay is grown. Feeding Psyllium is a preventative measure wherein veterinary research has shown that it helps in preventing both. Psyllium can sometimes be purchased at a local health food store in your area, in our area it is Henry's Market, in the vitamin or bulk department. We sell Psyllium for \$4.95 per pound, I consider that to be very cheap insurance. One pound of psyllium should be enough for one horse for one month.

Please Note: Always follow the advice of your veterinarian regarding your horse, especially if it has any health related problems that need specific feeding requirements.

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