

Feeding your horse over winter

Nikita Stowers MSc (Veterinary – Equine) BSc/BBS

So its winter time and you and your horse are feeling pretty miserable. Gone are those long summer days when you can ride every day after school or work. On top of this they are starting to look more like a shaggy sheep than your much beloved horse or pony. As daylight saving nears end and winter approaches your horses feed requirements may differ substantially or may just require a few tweaks to keep him in great condition over the cold months. Below are a few tips to ensure your horse or pony remains happy and in optimal condition over winter.

1. Think about last winter

The most important thing is to be prepared for these colder months. If your horse lost a lot of weight or maintained their condition last year there is a good chance they will do this again if nothing else in their diet or exercise regime has

“You may be in danger of over-supplementing your horse especially when doubling up on different concentrates or adding vitamin mineral supplements on top of already balanced feeds.”

changed. If you know your horse didn't maintain condition or topline you could look at increasing the energy in his total diet.

You can do this in a number of ways:

Forage – If you aren't feeding your horse enough forage, Winter is a great time to start. Because of how the horse and its digestive system have evolved they have an essential need for forage.

This is not negotiable! This needs to make up at least half of the horses diet at a minimum level of around 1.5% of Bodyweight to maintain digestive health. So if you have a 500kg horse this equates to around 7.5 kg of forage on a Dry Matter basis.

This can be made up by a combination of forage sources and in New Zealand we are lucky to be able to rely on our pastures to provide at least some of the nutrient requirements our horses require. However, because of the high moisture content in pasture during winter months it may not be able to completely fulfil the horses forage requirement nor its requirement for some important vitamins and minerals. Because of this,



it is useful to look at quality fibre sources such as FiberEzy® or FiberProtect® especially during winter months.

FiberEzy® or FiberProtect® provide a high quality fibre for the horse, providing it with safe energy whilst also helping to maintain its digestive health. FiberEzy® is a combination of lucerne and the equine specialty grass Timothy, which has undergone a Controlled Fermentation process to ensure optimal digestion and availability of nutrients.

FiberProtect® is 100% lucerne and has undergone a slightly different fermentation process called Modified Bio Fermentation and assists in the prevention and healing of gastric ulcers as well.

The added benefit of adding extra forage to the horses' diet during winter is it will help to keep your horse warm. When the horse is digesting forage, bacteria ferment the fibrous portion of the feed. As a result of this fermentation heat is produced and helps to keep the horse warm. If you are worried about your horse on those really wintery days and nights it will be much more beneficial to add an extra feed of fibre to the diet as opposed to grain or concentrate.

2. Monitor your horses condition regularly

During winter we are all guilty of leaving our horses for long periods with their rugs on but even in the space of a week or two your horse can drop condition. Make sure you take your horse's rug off at least once a week and give them a thorough check over. If you are happy they are maintaining their weight on their existing diet then you probably don't need to make any changes to

the diet unless their workload or the level of feed available (e.g. pasture availability) is changing. If your horse starts to lose condition you may want to look at higher energy forages such as FiberMix® or FiberProtect® which provide elevated energy but also address any concerns you may have about gastric health or lack of quality protein in the diet. If extra energy is still required, a grain based, complete feed or fat supplement might need to be considered, especially if you have used these feeds throughout previous seasons.

3. Make sure you keep the diet balanced

Whatever you choose to feed your horse at any time of the year, make sure the feed is balanced. Most grain-based concentrates are now balanced with vitamins and minerals to take the guess work out of feeding. Because of this, you may be in danger of over-supplementing your horse especially when doubling up on different concentrates or adding vitamin mineral supplements on top of already balanced feeds. To take the guesswork out of feeding your horse Fiber Fresh have developed two feeds that go above and beyond 'complete feeds' as we know it. FiberSure® and FiberEdge® provide all the essential nutrients your horse needs in the correct proportions, including their requirement for forage.

For advice on how to feed your horse this winter, please contact your local Fiber Fresh Area Consultant or ph 0800 545 545 :