

For Your Information

Courtesy Of:

Cotati Large Animal Hospital

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Feeding the Geriatric Horse

As horses age, maintaining an adequate weight is sometimes difficult. With age, their digestive tract may not be as efficient at utilizing the food they are fed. Older horses are more susceptible to parasitism and they have more frequent dental problems. If you have an older, thin horse, the first two steps are to have their teeth evaluated (1-2 times per year) if they are older than 20 years and to ensure that they are on a regular deworming program. With those important factors accounted for, a weight gain feeding regime can be instituted.

When feeding a horse to put on weight, the following feed stuffs are very helpful:

1. A complete pelleted feed such as Equine Senior. Feed at 10-15 lbs per day for a 1000 lbs horse
2. Corn Oil: this give the horse concentrated calories. The oil should be introduced slowly due to its bad taste; starting a ¼ cup twice daily and work up to 1 cup twice daily over few weeks.
3. Stabilized Rice Bran: 2-4 cups once to twice a day. This is also very dense in calories and will often improve hair coat quality. Be sure to get the stabilized form because the Calcium: Phosphorous ratio has been balanced in this formulation.
4. Ground Flaxseed:
5. A product with naturally digestive bacteria may help the horse digest their food more efficiently (Vitacharge, ForCo, Fastrak, Probios)
6. Offer high quality hays (grass and oat hay are usually better than alfalfa)
7. Trace Mineral Salt: to fill any deficiencies in the diet and increase water intake
8. Red Wheat Bran: 2-4 cups twice a day to help sweep any sand out of the large colon that would decrease the intestines ability to absorb nutrients
9. Always have fresh clean water available

If all the above have been instituted and the horse is still thin or lethargic, then blood work may be indicated to determine if there are other medical problems involved such as liver or kidney disease, muscle wasting, and heart disease.