

# What's wrong with feeding a high roughage diet? Absolutely nothing!!!!

Written by Equine Nutritional Therapist and Medical Herbalist Antoinette Foster Dip. Nut. ©2012



When you walk into the feed store are you highly confused? Have you been told that this feed is better than that feed and 'my horse is doing so well on this feed', basically since the pre-mix and pelletised feed hit the market some 40 years ago, the industry, that is non regulated has grown and grown.

Now there are so many feeds available it has confused the simplicity of feeding according to the species, a species that has evolved to consume primarily roughage. Horses are herbivores; they are grazing animals and require high levels of roughage.

Recent studies have even indicated that performance horses would do well on a forage/roughage diet with less concentrates. It is essential to provide a diet that supports the digestive system and its function. Supporting the digestive system, results in a happier, healthier and less stressed horse. These studies indicated that performance horses being fed a high forage/roughage diet actually increased performance levels, blood PH levels were higher which could indicate that there was a reduced risk of higher lactate levels.

I have been a practitioner for 25 years and I have always recommended a diet with high levels of roughage. Roughage is essential and definitely reduces the risk of digestive diseases such as ulcers, colic, diarrhoea etc.

Roughage also encourages the normal chewing process and assists in stimulating the enzymatic action at the point of the mouth.

Nutrition provides the basic building blocks on which our horses are built. How we feed our horses can effect reproduction, development in utero, the young foal, the developing athlete, competition horses and finally older horses  
Prevention is certainly better than cure!

Most humans can cite the amount they eat per day even the number of calories, fats protein etc. But do you know the number of calories your horse receives each day? Or the number of calories your horse requires? Do you know precisely what level of roughage/ grain, or if in fact your horse requires grain.

The most important rule to remember is that the total amount of Mega Cals of Digestible Energy is what is contained in everything your horse consumes not just grain, energy and protein is found in all types of feed, this means grazing also.



There are many software feed programs available but they do not take into consideration each horses individual requirements, they have a 'one size fits all approach'. The horse is classified as a non ruminant herbivore, horses do not have four stomach compartments like cows, goats and sheep, but they can still digest highly fibrous feeds such as grass and hay

Most importantly the anatomy and physiology of horses has not changed, but the way horses are being fed most certainly has.

Most feed and supplement recommendations are based on the National Research Council publication which is an American publication based on the American climate, soils etc. Every horse is genetically unique and requires a diet that suits this uniqueness. Generally speaking a Warmblood horse working 4-5 x 45 minute sessions per week will maintain condition and energy levels by being fed a diet that consists mostly of roughage. This horse could be fed based using a 2 liter dipper, 4 dippers of rough cut long stem Oaten Chaff, 1 & ½

rough cut long stem Lucerne chaff and 1kg of whole oats or steamed and rolled barley. Very importantly, include hays which really should consist of some Lucerne hay as well as Oaten hays, or grassy hay. Most horses performing this level of work could simply be fed the roughage component in hays and then a very small feed of say 1x 2 liter dipper of Oaten and Lucerne chaff with the oats and I always recommend a good natural daily formula, but one that is guaranteed to be compatible with the horses body and guaranteed to be well balanced. Or the other option would be to use a feed such as Johnsons Natural Formula, a steamed and compressed version of the above consisting of mostly roughage and 100% natural.

Remember Roughage is King!!

Please contact me for individual free advice for your horse's nutritional needs on 1300443676 or [antoinette@hiform.com.au](mailto:antoinette@hiform.com.au)