

NEGLECTED HORSES, WEIGHT LOSS/POOR CONDITION

UNDERSTAND THE HORSE'S CONDITION

The first step when recuperating a neglected horse, should be to have a veterinarian conduct a complete physical exam of the horse to check for immediate concerns, debilitating diseases and poor dentition and overall health. Take a blood sample to check for chronic infections, liver or kidney dysfunction. This will reveal if there is a serious disease that requires more advanced care and treatment. If no abnormalities are found, the failing horse may be suffering

from malabsorption or other alterations in digestion. Horses over 20 years old may have reduced apparent digestibility of proteins, fibre and phosphorus.

You will also want to determine the body condition score (BCS) of the horse using the Henneke scale. This is an important indicator of the rehabilitation steps needed and will help you understand the severity of its weight loss. The horse can also be weighed to help determine its condition.

HEALTHY AGED HORSE

For healthy older horses that are losing weight, "senior" feeds which provide 12–14% protein, with restricted calcium (<1%) and slightly increased in phosphorous (0.3 - 0.5%) are the type of feeds to aim for (Evolution Senior). Crude fibre content of the feed should be above 7% and preferably 10% especially if the feed is designed to be fed without hay.

Processed feeds in a more digestible form (extruded, pelleted and multi-particle) containing yeast culture and added fat (5 to 10%) will maximize digestibility without increasing the risk

of colic (Evolution Senior). If the horse does not drink well, feeding water-soaked feeds (1–2 gallons of water per feeding with 1 to 2 oz of salt) may encourage water intake.

Serve a top-quality hay, preferably a straight grass or grass/alfalfa mix. Avoid straight alfalfa, the calcium content may exacerbate failing kidney condition. Avoid poor quality or high fibre hay.

MALNOURISHED HORSES

Horses with a BCS of 3 or higher can normally be brought to the target BCS of 5 in about six to eight weeks. These horses should be fed a balanced diet of at least 2% of their body weight in four or five feedings per day. A diet should be constituted of a minimum of 50% good quality hay and a maximum of 50% concentrate feed. The amount of feed can be gradually increased to 1-1.25% of body weight with hay offered free choice and grain being fed two or three times a day (with a maximum. 5% body weight per feeding).

Complete feeds, such as Evolution Senior, are well suited to feed neglected horses due to their controlled starch, high digestibility and easy-to-chew attributes. Additionally, neglected horses are often salt-starved. Therefore, salt should be introduced gradually at one to two ounces per day and increased until it can be given free choice. At all times, fresh, clean water should be available.

STARVED HORSES

Horses with a BCS of 1 or 2 have experienced actual starvation. These situations typically happen over 60 to 90 days without feed or more often three to four months with very poor water and forage. Horses in these situations are often hypoglycemic and hyperkalemic due to muscle mass and fat loss. If the horse is able to get up and has lost less than 45–50% of its body weight, it can normally be rehabilitated. If it has lost 45–50% of its body weight and is not able to get up, be aware that the chances of successful rehabilitation may be reduced significantly.

ALFALFA HAY OPTION OR 50% HAY REPLACER (SUPERFIBRA CLASSIC AND SUPERFIBRA NATURE)

Quality alfalfa hay is a good base for a high-protein, low-starch diet. Frequent, small amounts of quality alfalfa hay should be fed, with the amount of alfalfa slowly increasing for each meal. The number of feedings should decrease gradually over 10 days, and after 10 to 14 days, the horse can be fed free choice. If the horse's dental condition is poor, alfalfa cubes or pellets or SuperFibra Nature may be used and soaked prior to feeding.

SENIOR HORSE FEED OPTION

Senior horse feeds with a controlled starch design, added amino acids, prebiotics and probiotics, balanced trace minerals and vitamins are a good option to give a neglected horse the nutrients it needs. The feed should be introduced at a rate of 0.5% body weight in several small feedings per day. Over a 10- to 14-day period, the amount of feed should

slowly increase per meal while the number of feedings gradually decreases. By the end of this period, the horse should be at a normal feeding rate according to feeding directions. The feed can also be soaked in warm water for up to 15 minutes to form a mash for horses with poor teeth.

NECESSARY ADDITIONAL CARE TO AID RECOVERY

➤ Deworming

➤ Vaccinations

➤ Hoof Care

RECOMMENDED PURINA PRODUCTS

FEED NOTES:

- All feeds should be introduced slowly and a proper transition over 1–3 weeks should be made.
- Prioritize highly concentrated feed in order to provide the horse with a high-calorie diet while leaving more room for hay in the total diet.

Recommended:

EVOLUTION MATERNITY
EVOLUTION SENIOR
EVOLUTION ELITE
SUPERFIBRA INTEGRI-T
EQUILIBRIUM TRIMAX
EQUILIBRIUM LEGEND XT
EQUILIBRIUM XCEL HD



SUPERFIBRA CLASSIC
 or **SUPERFIBRA NATURE**



may be used in part as a hay substitute.

Feed according to the Purina Superior recommendations. If the upper Purina guideline is not followed, consider adding a complete supplement such as **EQUILIZER** and the following specific supplements:

PUR-ATHLETE,
 a highly digestible source of fat and protein

HORSE PLUS,
 supports equine metabolism

HORSE-SHIELD,
 helps the digestion and absorption of nutrients.



If the Purina Superior guidelines are followed, the use of a supplement is not recommended.

NOTES: The selection and choice of possible Purina feeds when controlling and treating weight loss, associated or not with an underlying equine pathology, should be guided by a veterinary exam and blood test results. The symptoms and problems identified may be closely linked with weight loss or difficulty maintaining a proper healthy weight. It is important that the weight gain is done gradually and that it is monitored by a veterinarian to ensure consistency.

The choice should also take into account the animal's life stage, its activity level, its medical history, as well as the discipline it is performing in.

FEED RATE PROTOCOL NOTICE

This feeding protocol described here pertains only to Cargill Limited Horse Feeds. There is not established feeding protocol that all feed companies must follow. Purina provides two feeding rates on their tag a "Minimum" and a "Purina Superior". The "Minimum" meets the levels established by the NRC Nutrient Requirements of Horses (2007), which will prevent all classic nutritional deficiencies. The "Purina Superior" is a greater level of fortification that promotes an optimal level of performance and immunity. By no means does that imply "Minimum" is subpar, and for the non-competitive horse, that stays home year round and has no health issues there is probably no need to exceed this level. However, if you are feeding a true equine athlete, with all the immune stresses associated with that level of competition, then the "Purina Superior" level is paramount to ensure an optimal level of performance and immunity.