

Feeding Your Mini

by Diane and Danielle Cotton, Mirrindel Stud.

This article covers some important aspects of feeding miniatures. For more comprehensive information on feeding horses, I would recommend an excellent book by John Kohnke - "Feeding and Nutrition of Horses" ISBNNo.0958933995. Published by Vetsearch International Pty. Ltd. www.vetsearch.com.au. It gives lists of different foods, what they contain, their advantages & disadvantages, plus information on pastures and much other very useful info.

Feed requirements Minis need the same basic requirements in their feed as other horses.

This includes:

- 1) Fibre - which maintains active motility of the digestive system and provides a damp mass in the large bowel which promotes necessary bacterial fermentation and helps nutrient uptake, as well as a reserve against dehydration. Fibre should be the major component in a horse's food. Foods high in fibre include pasture grass, hay (lucerne or grass), bran, copra.
- 2) Carbohydrates - for energy and putting on weight. Foods high in carbohydrates include oats, corn, barley, wheat, rye, rice.
- 3) Protein - for growth and repair of body tissues. Foods high in protein include soybean meal, cotton seed meal, lupins, sunflower meal (some of these can also be high in fat so be careful if trying not to put on too much weight). Lucerne and clover is also reasonably high in protein.
- 4) Fat - a more concentrated energy source. Also helps put on weight and improves skin and coat condition. It is also necessary for absorption of Vitamins A,D,E and K. Foods high in fat include oils, sunflower seeds, linseed seed (linseed MUST be heat treated first to destroy toxins. Seeds should be boiled)
- 5) Vitamins and Minerals – various amounts in different foods
- 6) Water - must always be available

Vitamins and Minerals

Because minis and small horses are just that- small, they don't need much food and in many cases their intake needs to be restricted for showing or just to prevent them from foundering. BUT, because of this, nutrients (vitamins and minerals) become even more important for your mini than for your big horse. Your big horse can stuff himself with large volumes and get plenty of nutrients from his feed, but minis, living on small amounts need supplements to keep them healthy. We also need to realize that even horses at pasture often need supplements because the majority of Australian soils are extremely poor and lacking in numerous minerals. An example of a deficiency that arises from this is vitamin E and selenium deficiency. For Vitamin E to be of benefit, you need selenium, so a deficiency of either can cause the same problem, one of which is muscle weakness which can be a cause of stifle lock. Deficiencies can cause many other problems as well, some of which include fertility and reproduction problems, poor coats, brittle and cracking hooves and susceptibility to disease.

We have tried using mineral licks but they don't contain vitamins and often have large amounts of molasses which means that the horses gobble it up too quickly. We now use Equilibrium as a supplement. Nicole Kelly put us on to it - thanks very much Nicole! It is

economical as you only need small amounts and it contains balanced amounts of vitamins and minerals required by your horse.. We use it for all our horses. The year before we started using it, we lost 5 out of 9 foals at birth. Some were premature and presented wrongly. Needless to say, that was a nightmare year! It was the drought year while the mares were in foal but they were never thin as we have forty acres and there was sufficient grass but they were not really getting much in the way of extra feed. The next year we started mixing Equilibrium with lucerne chaff and a little copra (to bind it) in a wheelbarrow and gave all the horses handfuls a few times a week. Always cover copra with water first as it absorbs huge amounts of water and you don't want that happening in the horse's stomach. When we are conditioning the show horses, they get Equilibrium every day. The next season we had 100% live healthy foals that went to full term and had fuss free births. We have continued using Equilibrium and have had almost 100% foaling rates since, plus all foals going full term which means that they are presented properly at delivery which means less troublesome foaling.

Big Belly. Is My Horse Fat?

Is your horse Fat or Thin??? This can be difficult to assess in miniatures, unlike big horses. A common problem is that often a large belly in miniatures is looked at as being fat! This is often NOT the case. Fat is distributed evenly throughout the body NOT just around the stomach. Aside from pregnancy, large bellies can actually mean worms, poor condition, stomach ulcers, even starvation, or just a grass belly which means that the digestive system is filled with a lot of grass or hay. A mini can be dangerously thin and still have a large belly. You should check the condition by:

1. Looking at the back bone - is it well covered or is it sticking up?
2. Check the hips and top of the rump - are they well covered or are they bony?
3. Check the neck - it should not be falling away on top but just nicely covered.
4. You should NOT see ribs! With big horses, they can be in reasonable condition with ribs just visible or felt, but in my experience you would only see ribs on a mini that is near starvation or dead!



The horse pictured here has a large belly but is definitely not fat. It is bony around the hips and shoulder and it just does not look well. It needs a lot more condition on it and will look a lot better when it puts on weight. To prepare this horse for the showing you would

be worming it and feeding it really well. If you were to cut back it's feed because you think it has a big belly, you would actually be starving it and it could end up very sick, plus it's belly would not be fixed at all.

Mini's can be very difficult to condition for a show as they have small stomachs that are quickly filled by not much. You must bear in mind though, that a horse is supposed to be grazing all day and night. There is much evidence now that allowing long periods of time between feeds can lead to stomach ulcers. This is because acids build up in the stomach and when the horse chews it dilutes these acids. If the horse stops chewing for a long period of time then these acids build up so much that they can cause an ulcer in the stomach. Ulcers can also be caused by stress. You can tell when your horse has ulcers as it will not look happy, may also be hunched up in the back and seem quite sore under its belly and on their back. They will also have small, round, compact poos. Ulcers can be very dangerous. They can even lead to death from internal bleeding.

Ways to help prevent ulcers when show conditioning your horse:

1. Feed small amounts often. Don't leave your horse without food for too many hours. Preferably it should be let out into a paddock with a small pick in it during the day.
2. Feed grass hay over night if the horse is stabled, and small amounts now and then during the day if there is a necessity to stable it during the day or if no grass is available to graze. Grass hay is good because it takes a long time to chew. The slower they eat the better.

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Now this may worry you. You might be thinking "how am I going to feed my horse hay and have a big grass belly?"

Well, its all about feeding just the right amount and assessing the condition as you go. When we show a horse we generally bring them into the stable over the nights a few weeks before the show. The first night we might give them a mini hay net full of hay in addition to their normal hardfeeds. In the morning we then assess the damage. If their stomach looks too big then I rethink their meal at night.



Here is a photo of a horse in ideal condition

The other thing I look at is how much fat covering the horse actually has on its body. If there is not a lot of fat covering, then I wont worry to much about the belly. Remember too that exercise is a1so a great help to get your horse in condition.

If its three weeks before a show it isn't really going to matter if their stomach is a little big now as in the last week I will have time to cut their food back a little bit to help their tummy tuck up. It's all about getting the right amount for your horse, They are all different. Remember always to adjust feeds gradually and be very careful when reducing the amount of feed especially if the weather is cold as a lot of energy is used to keep a horse warm so in cold weather. they will need more feed.

Sudden reductions in feed or even just cold weather or stress can lead to hyperlipaemia which can be life threatening.

Remember when you are getting your horse ready for a show that he is an animal with a brain so continuous stabling will get very monotonous and boring so give them as much time as possible to play or just wander outside

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