



From Sport to Senior: the evolution of your horse's nutritional needs

As your horse gets older and you decrease his participation in trials or competitions, his nutritional needs vary. A horse's nutritional needs will depend on the amount of activity, age, metabolism, quality, and quantity of hay and pasture. Let's go through two different stages and provide feeding recommendations for your aging equine athlete as they make the shift from sport to senior.

Sport to Senior Horse Stage 1: 15 to 20 years old—Reduced Activity

The first stage usually begins when your horse is between 15 and 20 years old, the competition schedule has been reduced or retirement is now in effect. With reduced activity and lower energy requirements the amount of grains or feeds required to maintain body condition is also reduced. If you can maintain good body condition with very little feed per day in addition to hay and/or pasture, you should consider providing a ration balancer to provide the proper amount of nutrition needed for this stage of life.



Nutrition to Support Activity Reduction

Ration balancers provide a concentrated level of nutrients and a much lower feeding rate compared to a conventional horse feed. The recommended minimum feeding rate for a conventional horse feed is generally 0.5% of body weight per day or 2.5kg (5.5lbs) per day for a 500kg (1100lbs) horse. Ration balancers have an increased concentration level of amino acids, minerals, vitamins, and additives. This higher concentration provides a minimum recommended feeding rate of 0.1% of body weight per day or 0.5kg (1lbs) per day for a 500kg (1100lbs) horse. Many horses are fed only a supplement or supplement/feed combination due to efficient metabolism (hardy horses) or plenty of quality hay or pasture to meet energy needs.

At Purina, we have 2 high quality ration balancers available, Equilibrium Optimal and Equilibrium Equilizer. These products can be fed alone with a forage only diet or be mixed with a complete feed to enhance and balance the nutrition needed for this stage of life. These ration balancers are formulated with concentrated levels of amino acids, vitamins and minerals to provide all required nutrients to the horse for maintenance and integrity of muscle, coat and hoof condition.

Sport to Senior Horse Stage 2: 20 to 25 years old—Retirement and Dental Problems

The second stage occurs when your horse is retired or lightly ridden and is between 20 and 25 years old. You notice weight loss despite the fact that your horse is fed hay and feed. On closer inspection, you notice quidding of hay (partially chewed pieces of hay that have fallen to the ground) and slaving of grain, leaving waste (food that has fallen to the ground or into the feed container). This is due to poor dental condition. The teeth can no longer provide an effective cutting or shearing function that allows the horse to chew and swallow its food efficiently. Tooth loss can also occur at this age, which also reduces the horse's ability to chew and ingest its feed effectively, especially for low-quality hay (mature hay).

Nutrition to Support Retirement and Dental Problems

For older horses in this second stage needing weight gain, it is recommended to switch to a higher quality (softer) hay or chopped, cubed, or pelleted hay. Soaked alfalfa cubes make a good source of forage for the older horse, are easily eaten and are an excellent source of calories and digestible fibre. It is essential for the horse's digestive health to maintain a minimum of 1.5% of the horse's weight in long fibre per day (3/4 of an inch long, or 1.9cm) to maintain movement in the large intestine and prevent colic. A high-fat senior feed can provide the extra calories for the older horse that needs to gain weight. Choose a senior food with a controlled carbohydrate content and with guaranteed low levels of starch and sugar for extra food safety.

Various high-quality feeds are available to meet the specific dietary needs of the senior horse for these stages of life. Purina Evolution Senior with a 6% Fat and Equilibrium XCEL HD with a 12% fat is recommended, both being highly fortified feeds with quality fibre sources, high calorie content and low starch and sugar values.

Use these two steps when your horse transitions from an active racing or competition career to retirement to maintain optimal health and longevity.

At Purina, we believe that good nutrition plays the most important role in a healthy and happy life for every horse. That's why Purina horse feed is specially formulated for every stage of life and every level of activity.

Feel free to ask about our feeding program [formulated specifically for senior horses](#) to ensure that your horse receives optimal nutrition at mealtime, every time.

Cargill Animal Nutrition and the Canadian Purina ReTech Team.

