



EQUINE NEWSLETTER

WAUPUN VETERINARY SERVICES, LLC

Feeding Your Horse Over Winter

By Jackie Diedrich, DVM

Winter can be a tough time for many horses, especially when the weather changes. Older horses, younger horses and many in-between, will require extra energy to maintain their body temperature and weight.



A simple way to make winter easier on your horse is by ensuring they have adequate intake of calories (energy) which a horse receives through its feed. If you're unsure if your horse is at its ideal body weight, consider using Hennek's 9-point-scale to determine your horse's body condition. Your horse should be a 5-6 on the scale during the winter months.

Horses need to consume at least 1 percent of their body weight in roughage, such as hay and grass, to maintain their body weight and good digestive health. Ideally, horses should consume 1.5 to 2 percent but, in winter months, horses may need to increase their intake to 3 percent of their body weight. Feeding good quality hay is important. The hay should be free of dust and mold, cut to an appropriate length and stage of maturity analyzed. Hay that is cut when it is too mature has little nutritional value to your horse, and hay that is either coarse, "stemmy," or too fine, can cause digestive issues such as impactions.

Horses that are housed and fed inside during the winter typically have a lower energy requirement than those that are housed and fed outside. Grass hays, which are lower in energy, allow for maximal feed intake for stalled horses and may decrease boredom or stress behaviors allowing for lower incidences of gastric ulcers. Horses that are housed and fed outside have a higher energy requirement which can be met with higher energy forages such as alfalfa or mixed grass hays. During severe winter weather, it is recommended that hay offered outside should be in easy access feeders protected from the elements, such as under a three-sided shelter or monitored often for snow and ice buildup.

When cold stressed, some horses may struggle to maintain their weight on forage alone. Higher calorie supplements may be added to your horse's diet in this

situation. Some examples of these include grain-based concentrates or high fat supplements such as rice bran or edible oils. Remember, concentrates should only be used to supplement your horse's forage diet and should not be their main source of nutrition.

If your horse is a "hard keeper" and struggles to maintain weight during the winter months, it may be due to an underlying condition. A thorough physical exam and basic blood work is a great way to provide information to your veterinarian about your horse's blood, liver, kidney and electrolyte values. With that information, you and your veterinarian can come up with a plan on how to move forward in treating your horse.

With all the information out there on equine nutrition and feeding, it can be easy to forget about the most important nutrient – water. Clean, fresh water should always be available to your horse. A horse consumes 5 to 15 gallons of water per day. Ideally, the water should be kept at 45-65 degrees as drinking cold water will increase a horse's energy requirements. This increase of energy or the burn of more calories is needed to warm the water to match the temperature inside their digestive tract. Also, water should be provided at all times. However, if that is not possible, especially in the winter, water should be offered twice a day and left with the horse for several minutes each time to drink. If a horse does not drink enough, they are more susceptible to intestinal impactions, other colic and dehydration. To promote drinking, soaked feed such as beet pulp or hay pellets and cubes can be used if there is a concern.

Also, white salt blocks should be available, free choice at all times for your horse. However, not all horses use salt blocks, in which case a teaspoon of loose salt can be added to their concentrate daily.

Overall, winter weather can be hard on many horses. Knowing what your horse's body condition is, or should be, allows you as the owner to take charge and make adjustments as needed. These adjustments can be done by increasing their feed, changing the quality of their feed or supplementing your horse's diet with extra calories through concentrated feed will help your horse.

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Also, providing warm fresh water, soaked feed and salt can help increase water intake and decrease the intestinal upset or impactions.

If you have any questions or feel like your horse is a “hard-keeper,” struggling to maintain a healthy weight or showing signs of underlying health concerns this winter, contact our office to make an appointment with a veterinarian.

It is better to ask questions now and prevent problems later.

WVS Equine Newsletter

Welcome to the first edition of the Waupun Veterinary Services Equine Newsletter!

At WVS all of our 15 veterinarians work with horses, but there are several doctors who take a special interest in equine medicine.

The goal of this newsletter is to share some valuable information to help you care for your horse. The newsletter will be sent out quarterly and will discuss health issues that go along with the season.

Enjoy and happy trails!

The Importance of Vaccinating Your Horse

By Jackie Diedrich, DVM

Yearly vaccinating is an important part of overall equine health. It can help prevent or decrease the severity of some otherwise deadly diseases.

Vaccines are usually modified, weaker versions of the diseases we are trying to prevent. When a horse is given a vaccine, their body creates antibodies to fight the “disease,” that stay in the body for a period of time. If a horse is receiving a vaccine for the first time, a booster is needed 3-4 weeks later. After the initial series, vaccines are typically only needed annually.

There are five core vaccines in the United States. As defined by the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP), “core vaccinations protect against diseases that are endemic to a region, are virulent/highly contagious, pose a risk of severe disease, those having potential public health significance, and/or are required by law.” The core vaccines include, Rabies, West Nile, Tetanus, Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and Western Equine Encephalitis (WEE). West Nile, EEE and WEE are transmitted by mosquitoes so should be given in the spring before, “mosquito season.”

Vaccines such as equine influenza, equine herpes virus (EHV), strangles and Potomac horse fever, are considered risk-based vaccines. Influenza, EHV and strangles are respiratory diseases that are easily spread from one horse to another and are most commonly seen where there is a high density of horses such as boarding facilities and showgrounds. If you are showing or traveling with your horse, these vaccines are recommended.



Dr. Ralph is pictured above vaccinating a horse. Please plan ahead to schedule for your spring vaccines. Contact the clinic to make an appointment.

Potomac is a bacterial infection that can cause mild colic, fever, diarrhea and dehydration. It is most prevalent near rivers and streams and is transmitted by aquatic insects. Potomac cannot be passed from one horse to another but can be spread by contaminated water or hay.

Vaccination guidelines can vary from horse to horse. Factors to consider include age, location, travel, pregnancy and previous vaccination status. Spring is a busy time for everyone, and it can take several weeks for your horse to be protected after receiving a vaccine, so it is important to plan accordingly.

Waupun Veterinary Services is here to help you develop a vaccine plan for your horse. To learn more visit aaep.org for an adult horse vaccination chart.