

Growing Horse Nutrition

Growing horse nutrition is a topic that can not be fully covered in a short synopsis. The nutritional needs for growing horses is unique among our domestic species. Because we raise horses for their ability to work, for a long period of time, rather than just growth for consumption; we need development programs that support muscle and skeletal systems that can last for many years.

Horses continue to grow for many years although much of their mature height is reached by 2 years of age. The period of greatest concern is from 3 months and 18 months of age. This is the time of greatest skeletal growth and the need to put on muscle mass.

The greatest concern in growing horses is supporting overall growth without negative impact upon the skeletal system and the production of OCD lesions (Osteochondritis dissecans). There has been a lot of false information published in this area. In the recent past, protein was implicated as a negative factor, which has since been disproved. [It appears that in the initial study there were also treatment differences in micro and macro minerals that caused the problem rather than the protein.] There are indications that diets that produce a large “spike” in plasma insulin production may lead to increased predisposition to OCD lesions. At the same time data across multiple species shows that the greatest muscle deposition occurs at younger ages and the compensatory growth at latter ages is generally in fat tissue rather than protein.

Growth Goals

The goal should be for steady growth average daily gain will vary by breed type and mature size. For example, Thoroughbreds gain faster than Warmbloods for the first 3 or 4 months, but are approximately the same size by 7 months of age. Generally mid-size horses should gain at a rate between 1.2 to 1.8 pounds per day. Availability of forages will have an impact on growth rate. Studies with thoroughbreds in Kentucky typically see greater growth rates when the spring grass comes in, regardless of the foal age.

Because insulin spikes may increase the opportunity for OCD, it is important to limit this possibility. The best way is to supply feed continuously. As with all horses we want quality forage available at all times. One can avoid the insulin effect if one feeds many small meals rather than one or two large meals a day. By feeding 3, 4, or 5 times a day we can maximize growth and limit potential problems. It is also important to see that animals are individually fed to avoid overfeeding some and underfeeding others.

Exercise is also important for the proper development of the skeletal system. Bone density and strength are affected by exercise and the concussions of running cause the bones. Horses stalled have less bone density than those that have free movement. It appears that horses should have at least 12 hours a day of turnout to avoid bone loss.

Nutrient Requirements

Young growing animals require a nutrient dense diet. When the foal is weaned it no longer has access to the mare's milk, which was high in protein, fat, and calcium. Foals are typically weaned in the summer or fall depending upon birth date. Forages at these times of the year may be limiting as many go dormant in the heat of summer or decrease growth in the fall. In addition to the macro nutrients such as protein, energy, Calcium there is a real need for micro minerals and vitamins to support the immune function and to support bone and muscle growth. It is important to maintain feed intake at a steady pace.

Key Features of Prince Regency Growth Formula (#210000)

- Designed for weaning to 12 months of age
- Can be blended with Maintenance or Performance for yearlings from 12 to 24 months of age.
- Nutrient dense.
- Concentrate feed for minerals and vitamins.
- Chelated Mineral-superior biological availability
- Contains Natural Vitamin E- Greater biological availability with increased plasma concentrations compared to synthetic forms.