

## Feeding the Older Horse

Dr. Martin Adams, PAS – Equine Nutritionist for Southern States

With advances in nutrition and preventive health care, today's horses can expect to have longer and more productive lives than ever before. Many horses are living well into their late twenties and thirties, with a good quality of life. Special feeds have been developed for older horses, which meet their unique nutritional needs and extend their productive lives. A senior horse feed should be highly palatable, dust-free, easy to chew and digest, based on digestible fiber instead of grain, low in sugar and starch content, provide quality protein and with a guaranteed lysine level, and have added B-complex vitamins and a high fat content (5% or more). Triple Crown Senior Formula is a beet pulp/pelleted feed with 10% fat that is very palatable and contains more digestive aids than any available senior horse feed. Legends CarbCare Senior is a pelleted/extruded feed for older horses that is highly digestible, 7% fat and low in sugar and starch.

Following are some tips on feeding the older horse, to help you make the most of your horse's senior years.

- **Schedule regular dental examinations for your older horse.** Many horses have sharp points that develop on the edges of their molars that need to be filed down or floated. If hay and feed are not properly chewed, the horse may not be able to digest them well enough to obtain sufficient nutrients. If you notice your horse having trouble chewing, if he commonly drops his feed during mealtime, or he spits out balls of hay or grass, it is time to schedule a visit from the dentist.
- **Wet the feed, making a mash or soup for the senior horse.** Some older horses may have lost enough teeth or their teeth are worn down enough that they are unable to properly chew even senior-type feeds very well. Adding some warm water to the feed and allowing it to set for 15 to 30 minutes before feeding will allow the dentally-challenged horse to chew or swallow its feed better, and reduce the risk of choke and impaction colic.
- **Feed your older horse apart from aggressive eaters.** If you have several horses grouped together and don't have stalls to feed them individually, separate your older horse from the group so it can be fed alone. Unless your older horse is the most dominant horse in the group, it is not likely they would be able to consume all of their feed without a more dominant horse moving in and claiming the rest of the feed.
- **Select a senior horse feed containing highly digestible fiber sources.** Highly digestible sources of fiber include beet pulp, soybean hulls and alfalfa hay. These feed ingredients are easily broken down in the horse's digestive system, providing more calories and a lower risk of impaction colic than less digestible fiber sources. Feeds for older horses contain more fiber than most conventional horse feeds. Senior feeds can be consumed at higher rates than conventional horse feeds and are designed to replace most or all of the hay or pasture that the horse would normally consume. That's the reason they are called "complete" feeds, they contain enough fiber that they can be fed as the sole diet. Triple Crown

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Senior Formula contains beet pulp as a major ingredient and is less than 12% sugar and starch. Legends CarbCare Senior contains beet pulp (only 12% sugar and starch content) but is based on soybean hulls (only 6% sugar and starch content) and also includes alfalfa meal, all good sources of highly digestible fiber.

- **Choose a senior horse feed with a high fat level.** The older horse easily digests fat in the form of vegetable oil, which is the preferred form of fat for the horse compared to animal fats. Fat is a concentrated source of calories, containing more than twice the calories per unit than carbohydrates, which make up the majority of calories found in grain and hay. Triple Crown Senior Formula contains 10% fat from soy oil, rice bran and flaxseed. Legends CarbCare Senior contains two high-fat extruded particles for a total fat content of 7%, making this feed an excellent choice for the older horse. Many older horses will be affected by Equine Cushing's Disease (ECD), which alters normal cortisol, glucose and insulin metabolism and increases the incidence of founder or laminitis in affected horses. Triple Crown Senior and Legends CarbCare Senior contain high levels of fiber and low amounts of sugar and starch, which improves glucose and insulin metabolism and reduces the risk of laminitis in horses with insulin resistance and ECD.
- **Provide some long-stemmed fiber in your older horse's daily diet.** Although most senior horse feeds are high in fiber, and can be fed as complete feeds with no added fiber, these feeds can still lack what is called the "chew" factor and the "scratch" factor that will provide increased chewing and salivation, more gastric and intestinal buffering capacity, greater bulk and increased intestinal motility, and lower incidence of cribbing, colic and wood chewing. Even if your horse has few or no teeth, hay cubes or chopped forage can be soaked until soft and mixed into feed or fed separately to your older horse. For the dentally-challenged older horse who can only eat a limited amount of hay, use these guidelines: provide 0.5% of the older horse's body weight daily in chopped forage or hay cubes (five pounds daily for a 1,000-pound horse) and provide up to 1% of the older horse's body weight in senior feed (ten pounds daily for a 1,000 pound horse). Soak the hay cubes or chopped forage and senior feed before feeding, and divide the forage and senior feed into two to four daily meals.
- **Provide high quality forage for your older horse.** Poor quality hay is more difficult for the older horse to chew and swallow, and is more likely to cause an impaction colic. High quality hay is harvested at an earlier stage, is less fibrous and easier to chew, and breaks down quickly in the horse's digestive system, reducing the risk of impaction colic. Be sure to wet hay cubes before feeding to prevent the risk of choke and you may also wet the chopped forage to increase the ability of your older horse to chew and swallow. As the older horse ages and has decreased dental ability, change the forage in his diet from chopped to cubed to pelleted to insure that the forage fed can be consumed and body condition maintained.