



## Winter Health

It seems winter is upon us here in NZ, with cold days, plenty of rain, and horses with fluffy coats! Most horses are out spelling over the winter period, having a well earned rest, and some may still be in training for racing, hunting or competition. Each horse needs to have their own, individualized nutritional requirements met to get through winter comfortably. Many horses will have a change in diet for the winter, and there are some things we need to think about. Here is a little help from us ...



1. The most important thing is to be prepared. Don't wait for the temperature to drop dramatically or for snow to cover the ground before starting your winter regime. Keep in mind, each horse has its own, individual nutritional requirements, depending on their age and activity level. Give your horse enough time to build up the reserves they require to help them through the winter or cope with their competition or racing schedule.
2. Keep your horse warm by feeding lots of forage. Eating forage helps horses generate body heat, so feed more hay in the winter than in the warmer months. How do you tell if your horse is cold? A truly cold horse will shiver, just like a human. They may tuck their tail in and look "sucked up" in the flank area. Their hair coat will be prickled up and the bottom of their ears and armpits will be colder than your body temperature. A cold horse may need a warmer cover or more forage to warm them up.
3. With the onset of winter, we often increase the amount of hay in a horse's diet. The amount of water consumed is, therefore, vitally important for good health. A horse needs to drink enough water to lubricate the digestive system to prevent impaction-induced colic. If a horse drinks less water, it may also eat less, resulting in a loss of body weight and condition.
4. Monitor your horses' condition regularly. During winter, we can be a little guilty of leaving our horses for long periods without removing their covers. In even a short period of time, your horse can lose or gain condition. Make sure you take your horse's cover off each week they are resting, to give them a complete check over. If you are happy they are maintaining their body condition at their current activity level and on their current diet, then you probably don't need to make any changes. Keep in mind, if their activity level changes or the amount of feed available (e.g. pasture availability) is depleted, then you will need to look into alternatives for their diet.
5. Keep your horses' diet balanced. The quality of pasture tends to decline in winter, meaning they will be getting fewer nutrients. Provide all the essential nutrients, including forage, that your horse needs in the correct proportions. Most concentrate feeds (grains or other prepared feeds) are now balanced, with vitamins and minerals, to take the guess work out of feeding.
7. If you stable your horse during winter, it is important to have good ventilation. Many stables 'shut up' doors and windows to provide more warmth. Be sure to provide good air flow throughout your stable, to prevent the build up of ammonia, airborne dust, and dirt. This will provide good air quality and reduce the chances of respiratory problems, especially if you have a stable full of horses!
8. If you are out hunting, competing, or racing, electrolytes and nutrients need to be provided the same way as in the summer months. Even when the weather is cold, horses still sweat because of their heavy hair coats and their bodies still require the same vital nutrients used for energy production, muscle repair and recovery. Horses can become dehydrated in winter as well, so providing the correct electrolytes and nutrients will help maintain thirst and appetite.

Keep warm and well this winter!

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