

Feeding to Reduce Heat Stress

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While we humans enjoy all the benefits of summer, horses tend to have a tougher time enduring the heat. While air-conditioning the barn is not an option, we can do some things nutritionally that can help reduce heat stress.

The number one nutrient that we can provide is free access to clean, fresh water. Avoid water getting stale, dirty, or overly warm. As the horse sweats, it draws replacement water from the reservoir of water found in the large intestine. This reservoir is necessary for proper fermentation and movement of feedstuffs through the digestive system. If this water is not replaced, fermentation will be adversely effected increasing the potential for colic. A rough way to determine if your horse is drinking enough is to pinch a fold of skin on the shoulder and note how quickly it snaps back into position. If a horse is severely dehydrated, the skin remains "tented" and does not return to normal.

Another key to summer feeding is to make sure that there is access to a source of salt. The two electrolytes that most often need to be replaced from sweating are sodium and chloride, which is plain white salt. This access can be as simple as a salt block, or on a higher plain of nutrition, Equimin mineral. Other electrolyte supplementation may be necessary if the amount of exercise lasts for longer periods or when work intensity increases, causing excessive sweating. Electrolytes control certain cellular functions such as muscle contraction, maintenance of blood pH, fluid balance, and transmission of nerve impulses. As with salt, a good electrolyte supplement should contain about 45 to 55 percent chloride and 20 to 25 percent sodium, plus 15 to 20 percent potassium and one percent each of calcium and magnesium.

Excessive or constant use of electrolytes is not beneficial because the horse will just excrete the excess minerals. The best method is to supplement 24 to 48 hours prior to extensive activity, during the activity, and 24 to 48 hours after the activity.

Check the weight of your horses. Horses who are overweight have a harder time expending excess body heat during the summer. Especially overweight horses that are working for a living. You may need to reduce exposure to pasture and consider a feed like Triple Crown Lite or Triple Crown 12% Supplement to get the vitamins and minerals they need without the calories.

Furthermore, feeding diets utilizing organic minerals help horses with stress and improve heat resistance. Non-organic mineral sources, like oxides and sulfates, do not provide that same response. Both Legends and Triple Crown feeds provide the levels and types of organic minerals needed to help with heat stress.

Finally do not overlook good quality fiber in the diet. Contrary to popular opinion, fiber actually produces more internal body heat than grain, including corn. However, the

incremental heat produced is negligible. Extensive research does show, however, that horses will drink water within 30 minutes of eating fiber. The same goes for high fiber feeds such as Respond, Triple Crown Complete and Senior. Therefore, high fiber, complete feeds will help prevent dehydration during those hot summer months.