



CHANGES IN YOUR HORSE'S DIET:

You may be thinking your horse is in need of a senior diet, or perhaps there is a new feed available that you believe is even better for your horse. Maybe you are no longer happy with your current feed. Or, your retailer no longer carries the product you were using. Whatever the reason, switching your horse to a new feed is a change that requires care and know-how.

It's important to transition your horse gradually over a 7-10 day period, gradually increasing the new feed and decreasing the old. Throughout the process, you'll want to watch your horse's body condition and adjust feeding rates as needed.

Mixing with Current Feed – An Example Process

If still have some of your current feed, here is an example of how to transition:

	Current Feed	New Feed
Day 1-2	80%	20%
Day 3-4	60%	40%
Day 5-6	40%	60%
Day 7-8	20%	80%
Day 9-10	0	100%

No Current Feed Available

Whether you just simply ran out, or your favorite feed has been discontinued or no longer carried by your retailer, sometimes you may not be able to mix their old and new feed slowly. While not ideal, if no current feed is available, you can still safely transition to the new feed.

Because you don't have any of the old feed to mix, you'll want to reduce the total amount you feed your horse, and gradually increase it again over 10 days using the new feed. It is a good idea to offer some extra hay or pasture-time during this transition, as well. Feed your horse the new feed as follows:

	% of recommend feeding rate of the new feed
Day 1-2	20%
Day 3-4	40%
Day 5-6	60%
Day 7-8	80%
Day 9	100%

While the above two scenarios provide an example, it may not be perfectly suited to all situations. Some horse owners choose to change between products by 1 cup per day, and make the transition over a longer period of time if they are feeding large quantities. If you are changing from a low non-structural carbohydrate (NSC) feed to a higher NSC feed, make the transition even more gradually. Same for a low fat to a high fat diet. Additionally, if your horse is a picky eater, or prone to digestive upsets, or colic, make the change over a longer period of time.

One other change in our horse's diets we often forget to take into account is changing hays! You would never change a feed suddenly, so why would changing hays be any different? Especially given that hays make up 60-95% of your horse's diet? Even if you always get your hay from the same supplier, hays will vary widely year to year. Moving barns? You can bet that the hays will be different, even if both barns have good quality hay. The energy and nutrient content in hay can vary drastically depending on the plant species, geography, soil conditions, plant maturity at harvest, climate conditions, baling and storage methods, etc. Even hay that comes out of the same field from consecutive cuttings can have large differences in quality and nutrient content that should be considered.

It is important to gradually transition from the previous hay to the new hay over a 2-3 week period. Just like when switching feeds, incrementally replace a small portion of "old hay" with the "new hay". Another change that should not be overlooked, it transitioning to and from pasture.

In the fall, in preparation for winter, horses that are only on pasture should have hay introduced gradually, before the pasture runs out! Pasture is very high in moisture, while hay is very low; a sudden change from pasture to hay can result in colic.

Inversely, in the spring, when starting to turn horses out on pasture for the first time, they should be fed hay first. Do not turn them out with empty stomachs! Initial grazing should be limited to 15 to 20

minutes and gradually increased each day by 15 minutes until the horses are out for about 4 or 5 hours, at which time they can be allowed unrestricted time. If horses are allowed too much initial grazing time, the risk of digestive disturbance is increased as it takes the microflora in the gut some time to adjust to the difference in forage source.

As horse owners, it is important to keep in mind that ANY sudden changes in diet, including fresh pasture and hay, can disrupt the environment in the gut where communities of microbes reside. Consequently, this disruption in the microbial population and digestive process can put the horse at risk for GI upsets (e.g. excessive gas production, colic, diarrhea, discomfort, etc.).

It takes approximately 3 weeks for the microbes in a horse's gut to adapt to dietary changes, thus making slow, gradual forage transitions over a 2 – 3 week period important to help prevent GI upset. When it isn't possible to make a full two week transition, then allow for as much of a gradual transition as possible even if it is only over 2 – 3 days. Providing dietary pre- and probiotics can also help support gut microbes through dietary changes especially if they are rapid.

In summary, no matter what the change, between different feeds, hays, or pasture, be sure to think about it ahead of time, and plan for it. Make sure you have enough of your previous feed or hay to make the transition to the new one. The more time you can give your horse's digestive system to adjust, the better it will be for their digestive health and can help reduce the risk of digestive upsets. As always, if you have any questions about making changes to your horse's diet, contact an Equine Nutrition Consultant. Purina has Equine Nutrition Consultants available through Purina Connect.

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