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# How to Keep Weight on Older Horses

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Keeping weight on geriatric horses can be a challenge, but [here are some tips to make it easier](#).

## MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR VET

Senior horses can be more difficult to keep weight on, but don't assume that the weight loss or lack of condition is due to old age. There are many underlying conditions that can cause a horse to lose weight, and treatment for those conditions can make putting weight back on much easier.

- **Your vet may want to check your horse for parasites.** A fecal egg count can tell you if your deworming program is effective or if you have resistance

and you're feeding the worms instead of your trusty companion.

- **Additionally, chronic conditions can cause your horse to lose weight.** Many older horses suffer from arthritis, which can make trips to the feeder or walking around the pasture uncomfortable. Treatment for arthritis is often multimodal and may consist of medications, therapy and moving hay racks and nets to shoulder height.
- **Chronic infections, gastric ulcers, metabolic disease, kidney or liver**

**disease or other diseases can make it difficult to keep weight on a senior.**

Be sure to observe your horse closely to see if you can pick up on any abnormal behaviors prior to your vet's visit. Your vet might want to run blood work or do other diagnostic testing to rule out any of these conditions.

- **Finally, dental issues can be a big issue for any horse, but especially older horses.** Dropping food, bad breath or unchewed grain in fecal piles can be signs that your horse needs dental attention. A good oral examination can spot any issues, and issues can be corrected to decrease pain and help your horse eat like they should.

## LOOK AT HOW YOU ARE FEEDING YOUR HORSE

How you are feeding your horse can be almost as important as what you are feeding your horse.

- **Feed multiple small meals.** For many older horses, they will consume more feed if it is broken up into 6 small meals per day.
- **If you are soaking the feed,** don't feed them more soaked feed than what they can consume in one meal.
- **Is there competition at the feeders?** As horses age, their position in the herd may change. Is your horse being crowded out when they go to have a snack?
- **Insects can be an issue as well.** Are flies annoying your horse when they go to eat or graze? A comprehensive fly control program or providing a physical barrier (such as sheets or fly masks) may help

your horse focus more on eating and less on annoying pests.



- **Is there always fresh, clean water?** Free access to clean water is important for body functions and to maintain a normal appetite and digestion. Special attention should be paid in the winter to make sure that the water is not only ice free, but also maintained at a warm temperature. Horses will drink less water in the winter if it is cold.

## LOOK AT WHAT YOU ARE FEEDING YOUR HORSE

Now that you're feeding in the correct way and any underlying conditions have been ruled out, corrected or long-term therapies have been started, it's time to focus on the food.

- **Make your vet and nutritionist a part of this conversation.** Each senior horse is different and will have different needs. Work with your professionals and tailor a plan that is perfect for your senior.
- **A high-quality forage may be important for some horses.** Make sure that you are buying the best hay for them. A nutritional analysis of the hay will



show that your geriatric horse is getting the best nutrition possible.

- **Fat!! Seniors are all about the omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids.** Senior feeds are often rich in fat to help boost calories. Rice bran, vegetable oil and flax seed can be other good sources of fatty acids and help keep the weight on. Introduction of a fat source should be done slowly to give your horse time to adjust and prevent any unwanted side effects (such as greasy diarrhea).

As your horse gets older, more attentiveness may be required within their daily routines. Regular check-ups with your veterinarian and good dietary and exercise management are vital to your aging horse's health and well-being. Pet insurance for horses can also help pay for veterinary costs. The ASPCA® Pet Health Insurance program offers the first stand-alone accident and illness coverage for veterinary expenses, with the ability to add preventive care coverage for an additional cost\*. Learn more at [www.ProtectYourHorse.com](http://www.ProtectYourHorse.com).



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