

Ask the Nutritionist



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Ask the Nutritionist is a monthly column featuring questions answered by PhD equine nutritionists and sponsored by Purina Animal Nutrition. Have a nutrition question you want to see featured? Email Marie Rosenthal. For clinics looking for specific nutritional advice, visit purinamills.com/ask-an-expert.

What nutritional strategies can be used to support horses experiencing chronic colic symptoms?

Dealing with horses experiencing chronic colic or repetitive colic episodes can be highly frustrating for both owners and veterinarians. Many conditions—including gastric ulcers, enteroliths, uroliths and others—may result in frequent bouts of colic. Horses should be screened for these conditions and treated appropriately. However, many cases of chronic colic require changes to the horse's diet.

Nutritional management can help to reduce or even eliminate chronic colic episodes. These guidelines can serve as a starting point for managing each unique case:

- Consistent feeding practices
- Slow dietary changes
- High-quality forage
- Complete feeds
- Gastric support

CONSISTENT FEEDING

A stable and consistent diet is crucial in maintaining gastrointestinal health. Consistently feeding small, frequent meals is important to support optimal gastrointestinal function. Feeding a high-quality concentrate can also help.

FORAGE QUALITY

Forage consistency, whether hay or pasture, is often a critically overlooked component of the diet. Pasture and hay analyses allow you to fully understand the forage's nutritional contribution to the diet. A good-quality grass hay can decrease the risk of digestive upset, so look for hay with a relative feed value (RFV) > 87, an acid detergent fiber (ADF) < 42 (as fed basis) and a neutral detergent fiber (NDF) < 60 (as fed basis). If quality forage is not available, [forage alternatives](#) such as hay cubes, hay pellets or hay stretcher products like Purina® Impact® Hay Stretcher can offer more nutritional consistency and serve as a full or partial forage replacement.

DIETARY CHANGES

Changes to the diet should occur slowly over time for both the concentrate portion of the diet as well as the forage component. Horses that experience

GUIDELINES TO REDUCE COLIC EPISODES



Establish a consistent feeding schedule



Slowly make dietary changes



Provide continual access to high-quality forage



Offer a gastric support supplement



chronic, colic-like symptoms may require a longer transition than other horses. The average transition period between the old feed or forage and the new feed or forage should be at least 5 to 7 days. An even more conservative rule of thumb for sensitive horses is to make the change at a rate no faster than 1 pound of new feed per day.

COMPLETE FEEDS

In some cases, replacing all or a portion of long-stemmed hay with an easily digestible complete feed, like Purina® Equine Senior® horse feed can reduce the frequency of colic bouts. If a more calorically dense complete feed is needed, try Purina® Omolene 400® horse feed. When fed as a complete feed, these feeds should be supplied at 1.5 – 2.0% of bodyweight daily and offered in small, frequent meals.

GASTRIC SUPPORT

Gastric discomfort can also be a cause of chronic colic. Continual access to forage that includes some alfalfa can help to manage gastric discomfort and mitigate the risk of developing or worsening gastric ulcers. Feeding Purina® Outlast® Gastric Support Supplement supports gastric comfort by promoting optimal gastric pH, and it can be offered with meals and as a snack prior to exercise and stressful events. Ensuring the pH of the horse's stomach remains at an optimal level for prolonged periods can help to support overall gastric health and comfort in the horse.

Contact a Purina PhD nutritionist for a complimentary consultation through Purina Customer Service, 800-227-8941 or send us a message at www.purinamills.com/ask-an-expert.

UPCOMING TOPICS

August: Lameness
September: Cardiology
October: Reproduction

Have a question you want to see featured? Send them to modernequinevet@gmail.com.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Robert Jacobs, Ph.D., is the Equine Innovation Manager at Purina Animal Nutrition. He is responsible for conducting research aimed at better understanding how nutrition impacts various areas of equine physiology.