

# Ask the Nutritionist

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*Ask the Nutritionist is a new 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 the Editor. For clinics looking for specific nutritional advice, visit [purinamills.com/ask-an-expert](http://purinamills.com/ask-an-expert).*

## We occasionally see horses in our clinic that are sick and have gone off feed. What are some feeding options to ensure they are receiving the nutrition they need for recovery?

When a horse has little to no appetite, it's a sign of serious illness. If the gastrointestinal tract is functional and the underlying cause of inappetence has been addressed, it's critical to get the horse eating again to help maintain proper gut function, deliver calories and nutrients essential for healing, and prevent weight loss.

To encourage voluntary intake, first offer a variety of feeds to determine what the horse will eat. Some highly palatable options include:

- **Fresh grass**
- **Leafy alfalfa hay**
- **Soaked alfalfa cubes**
- **Bran mash mixture**
- **Oats**
- **Texturized sweet feed (such as Purina® Omolene® 200 or 400)**
- **Senior feed (such as Purina® Equine Senior®).**

Adding molasses, applesauce, or even carrot-flavored baby food on top of the ration can also tempt them to take a bite. Note: Be sure to remove any feed the horse leaves for an extended period to avoid spoilage. Some experimentation may be necessary to find what the horse prefers. If the horse still refuses to eat, then enteral supplementation may be warranted.

### HORSE INAPPETENT?

Try these highly palatable options:



Fresh grass



Bran mash mixture



Leafy alfalfa hay



Oats



Soaked alfalfa cubes



Texturized sweet feed or senior feed

Traditionally, enteral preparations have been made from commercially available human liquid diets (i.e. Vital HN and Osmolite), senior feed slurries, or homemade recipes (i.e. the “Naylor diet”). However, liquid diets have been associated with an increased risk of diarrhea and laminitis. Creating a low-volume, nutritionally balanced mixture that supports optimal recovery and proper hindgut function with feed slurries and homemade recipes is difficult. Purina® WellSolve® Well-Gel® formula is a high-fiber, low-bulk enteral preparation formulated specifically for inappetent horses. This commercially available powdered formula is a concentrated source of easily digestible protein, vitamins, and minerals designed to be mixed with 2–3 parts water (or more as needed for desired consistency). Three pounds per day will deliver 100% of protein, vitamin, and mineral requirements when fed as directed, while also supplying digestible fiber to maintain a healthy hindgut. Well-Gel® formula is not sold in stores and is only available to veterinarians through veterinary supply companies. If long-term enteral feeding is needed (>5 days), an equine nutritionist can provide more specific recommendations tailored to the individual patient.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Kelly Vineyard is a Senior Nutritionist, Equine Technical Solutions, with Purina Animal Nutrition. She is responsible for providing expert technical nutrition advice and insights in a variety of areas, including new product innovation and research and veterinarian and customer technical support.