

# 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](http://purinamills.com/ask-an-expert).*



## Do my clients really need to creep feed their foals?

It's that time of year when foals arrive or are already on the ground, and we're quickly approaching weaning. The best foal feeding advice to give your clients is to creep feed their foals. Creep feeding requires a specialized feeding environment that allows the foal to access feed but does not allow the mare access. Creep feeding enables foals to become accustomed to the diet they will consume post-weaning and enables their GI tract to gradually adapt to the change from milk to concentrate feed.

Creep feeding also allows you and your clients to better monitor foal feed consumption because the mares and foals are no longer eating together. In a traditional feeding setup, some mares will allow foals to consume as much as they like, but others don't let foals consume anything. Providing foals with individual access to feed ensures a more precise supplemental feeding method, plus you can monitor what and how much the foal consumes each day. Individual feeding also allows you to creep feed the foal based on its age, bodyweight and body condition score.

### OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS

Creep feeding may seem unnecessary or cumbersome to your clients. After all, aren't the foals getting all their needs from the dam's milk and what they eat from the dam's feeder or pasture?

If your client relies solely on mare's milk for adequate nutrients for the suckling foal, then suddenly removes milk at weaning while adding concentrate feed and more forage, the rapid change can create a nutrition gap. In some cases, weaning-time stress causes foals to go off feed. Foals may burn more calories from increased whinnying and running around looking for their dams. To reduce stress to the mare and foal during weaning, your clients must provide constant, supportive and familiar nutrition to the foal. Creep feeding keeps foals eating and ensures consistency in their life.

### 5 Benefits of Creep Feeding Foals



Preparation for post weaning diet



Help GI tract adapt to change from milk to concentrate feed



Closely monitor feed consumption



Help maintain a steady growth rate



Provide consistency during the stressful weaning period

Foals weaned without creep feeding must catch up on nutrients they may have missed during the weaning process and can experience compensatory growth after the sudden addition of concentrate feeds and additional forage. This catch-up period or rapid growth can contribute to the development of a variety of orthopedic problems ranging from contracted tendons to other developmental orthopedic diseases (DODs).

### SETTING IT UP

It may require some creativity to develop a creep feeding program that works for your client's barn or facility. Use specialized feeders and fencing configurations in pastures or creep feeding buckets in barn stalls. When setting up creep feeders in pastures, foals

should be grouped with their contemporaries by age or bodyweight to ensure they receive proper amounts of feed and that larger, more dominant foals do not overeat.

Creep feeding is worth the time and effort to implement individual foal feeding strategies. Foals get the right nutrition in proper amounts, so they maintain a steady growth rate, which contributes to the sound and healthy growth of their bodies.

**Contact a Purina Ph.D. nutritionist for consultations through Purina Customer Service, 800-227-8941 or send us a message at [www.purinamills.com/ask-an-expert](http://www.purinamills.com/ask-an-expert).**

### UPCOMING TOPICS

**April:** Special needs of the competition horse

**May:** Endocrine disorders

**June:** Infections

**Have a question you want to see featured? Send them to [modernequinevet@gmail.com](mailto:modernequinevet@gmail.com).**



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Mary Beth Gordon, M.S., Ph.D., is the Equine Research and New Product Development Director at Purina Animal Nutrition. She studies the effect of nutrition on horse health, separating trends from true efficacy.