

Ask the Nutritionist

BY KELLY VINEYARD, M S, P H D

Ask the Nutritionist is a new monthly column featuring questions answered by PhD equine nutritionists and sponsored by Purina Animal Nutrition.

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What are some guidelines for feeding a horse after colic?

Developing a post-colic feeding plan depends on the nature of the colic episode, and whether surgery was performed or not.

Simple colic (i.e. no specific diagnosis): Horses may return to a normal feeding regimen fairly quickly. Food and water should be withheld during the episode, and normal feeding may be resumed once the horse is passing feces and no longer painful. It's recommended to offer forage but reduce or withhold concentrate for 1–2 days to prevent excess gas production. Ensure adequate hydration and review the horse's feed and general management practices to identify potential problems.

Small intestinal resection: The introduction of feed and water should only occur if there is evidence of gastric motility and no gastric reflux. In order to minimize stress at the anastomosis site, feed small, frequent meals (1–2lbs. every 3–4 hours) of a soft, low-bulk ration. Suitable feeds include fresh grass while hand grazing and slurries made with a complete pelleted ration such as Purina® Equine Senior®, alfalfa pellets, or an enteral diet such as Purina® Wellsolve® Well-Gel. Good quality long-stem hay can slowly be re-introduced after 3–4 days.

Large intestinal resection: Introduction of feed and water should only occur if there is evidence of gastric motility and no gastric reflux. Similar to the recommendations following small intestinal resection, feed small, frequent meals (1–2lbs., every 3–4 hours) of easily di-

gestible forage or pelleted complete feed post-surgery. Ad-lib alfalfa hay can usually be fed 24 hours following the initial offering. Diarrhea is a common complication following surgery and feeding small amounts of high-quality grass hay at frequent intervals may help resolve the issue. Grain concentrates should be avoided for approximately 10–14 days following surgery.

Impaction, strangulation, and obstruction colic: Offer water and a diet of fresh grass, alfalfa pellets, alfalfa hay, or pelleted complete feed (such as Equine Senior) once the colic has been resolved and fecal transit is confirmed. Feeding 1 lb. every 3 hours allows the monitoring of intake-and-response of intestinal motility. Ad-lib hay can normally be offered 24 hours after the initial offering. Grain concentrates should be avoided until at least 10–14 days post-surgery, at which point a normal diet may be resumed if the horse is responding well. In the special case of enteroliths, alfalfa hay should not be fed in the future.

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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.

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