

# Healthy Winter Weight Gain and Feeding Tips

By Gold Director, Judy Sinner, WA

Although it seems amazing to those of us with healthy Dynamite® horses, weight gain is a big issue in the equine industry. So, I would like to address some of the “feeding myths” that exist, and point out some healthier alternatives.

## Myth #1: Feed corn oil for weight gain.

We have probably all done this one! Fact is, though, horses do not have gall bladders and so oil is absorbed through the lacteal ducts. When oil is present, these fat soluble vitamin receptor sites are blocked and so absorption of vitamins A, D, E and K is inhibited. Vitamins A and D are important in calcium metabolism, so one would definitely not want to feed oils to broodmares, or growing horses, or horses in strenuous athletic endeavor, or older arthritic horses. Doesn't leave many horses that can have oil, does it? Vitamin E is a major antioxidant, important to the absorption of selenium and to immune function, and vitamin K is necessary for proper blood clotting. According to Nutrition News, polyunsaturated oils such as corn oil fed in large amounts can disrupt the immune system, and now you know why. Naturopathic doctors also consider corn oil to be a cause of inflammation in joints. So why do we see so much corn oil at the race tracks... hmmm. Check feed labels for oils added, very common in senior rations and high performance feeds, and in supplements like rice bran. And often other companies add fat in the form of animal fat now there's a great idea for an herbivore! It goes without saying that animal fat is nearly always preserved with ethoxyquin, BHA or BHT, more reasons to read labels. (Note here: if the final feed processor does not add these icky preservatives, they don't have to list them on the label, even though they are in the fat source!) I even recently checked, at a client's request, a feed label that included mineral oil as a “fat” source. (Mineral oil is a petroleum product, FYI).

### **A better solution:**

Our H.E.S. Pellets (High Energy Supplement) contain whole extruded organic soybeans with all the oil and enzymes still present. It is the fractionated oil (separated from the seed or grain) that is the problem for horses. H.E.S. Pellets are awesome for weight gain, and are a component of our miraculous Pelleted Grain Ration. Just 1/2 pound( or up to 1 1/2 pounds a day of H.E.S. added to the grain for a horse in heavy training like endurance) will put on weight and muscle tone in a big way. And, no, they don't make a horse hyper - in fact, they have a very balancing effect, especially on “wiggy” mares. Or, instead of feeding corn oil, just feed more corn. Like Ragu says, “it's in there!” Our new TNT includes a full cup of HES Pellets in every dose, it is a great one for weight gain.

## Myth #2: Corn is bad for horses.

So, that was a natural segue. Corn has received a bum rap long enough. It has twice the calories of oats per quart, so it is a very cost effective way to fatten a horse. Corn is not a “hot” feed, because it is fiber digestion that generates heat. Oats generate twice the thermal units per pound as corn, during digestion! Corn is low fiber (approximately half the fiber content of oats) so you do need to make sure that you are feeding a high fiber hay like grass hay if you feed much corn. Cracked corn is probably the safest if you are concerned about mold, since steam rolled or flaked corn is obviously exposed to moisture. Heavy molasses content sweet feeds - not! Molasses adds moisture, and then mold inhibitors are added to the feed. So, throw in a few handfuls of cracked corn to your oats and/or barley mix to add some calories. Or, consider the H.E.S. Pellets again, with the added corn germ meal. The optimal grain program is our Pelleted Grain Ration, most of us feed only a few cups a day - it will literally amaze you, and even Distributors on the East coast find it cost effective.

### Myth #3: Horses will not gain weight on grass hay.

Well, I am here to tell you they will, as long as the grass hay is of high quality and the horse's teeth are good. (Hint: employ a good equine dentist starting when the horse is 6 months old - a quick annual "float" is not good enough!) In fact, we highly recommend that grass hay be the primary hay source, with only up to 20 percent the ration as alfalfa in some cases.

Alfalfa hay is often 18-20 percent protein or higher, and protein is not an effective source of calories. Our rule of thumb is that mammals should not have a higher protein level in their diet than their mother's milk, and mare's milk is about 12 percent protein. Excess protein is acid-forming upon digestion, and will cause the body to leach calcium and other minerals from the skeleton and tissues in order to buffer the acid in the bloodstream. Horses on high-protein diets tend to have "styrofoam" bones and lots of tendon and ligament problems, and to become arthritic at an early age. I noted last year that the German Olympic team, who cleaned our clocks at the Atlanta horse events, would not feed more than a 10 percent protein ration overall. Interestingly, horses on high protein (alfalfa and high protein grain rations) can LOOK fat, but take away that protein for a few days and they will literally urinate themselves thin! The tissues are retaining water to dilute the acid from the protein, and they are not building lean healthy muscle tissue. So, get the best grass hay you can find, and better yet, sign up the grower and have the hay fertilized with HumiZyme!

**Incidentally, winter tip:** grass hay for fiber will increase the body temp in the cold much more than increasing grain or feeding alfalfa. Free choice the grass hay in cold weather and make sure they have plenty of water, and they will stay toasty. Since it is -2 degrees as I write this, my trusty thermometer on the deck tells me, I felt inspired to share that warm thought! The gang says "Hi" as they munch contentedly.

### Myth #4: Salt can be force-fed, instead of being offered free-choice

While doing a seminar in southern California a couple of years ago, Regan and I were amazed at how blubbery the horses at the arena facility appeared. When we looked at the supplement they were being fed, the answer was apparent. The stuff was mainly salt! Third ingredient was sodium chloride, fifth ingredient was potassium chloride, etc. The horses looked like walking water balloons. Examine feed labels carefully, since many of the commercial mixes and supplements contain a lot of salt, and people are then impressed with the "weight gain" that the horses exhibit.

I know of barns where the management just tosses in a handful of table salt with the feed rather than supplying free choice salt, especially in the winter "to keep them drinking." Well, I should hope to shout that you would drink a lot too if somebody were poking salty food down you, but you would still be dehydrated. So, here is the abbreviated "soap box" on salt. Salt needs to be natural, unprocessed and unbleached, and in loose form for horses. Blocks contain all sorts of chemical glop (read the labels!) and are not suited to horses who, unlike cows, have smooth tongues. Blocks will also mess up the TMJ if horses try to chew on them, and sticking blocks on the wall is a particularly bad idea - try cranking your neck up and sideways and licking on the wall long enough to get something that your body really needs, you will quickly get the idea! Salt should clump when the weather is wet, if it doesn't, it is working in reverse in your body because the function of salt is to attract water. Yep, white table salt works in reverse, toss that stuff out. Don't ever - repeat, ever! -force feed electrolytes in drinking water. The cardinal rule of electrolyte supplementation is to offer the horse plain water alongside the supplemented water, and let his instincts decide. Again, read labels. Most commercial electrolytes are processed salt, many have a backwards sodium/potassium balance (see my previous article on electrolytes for the full scoop on this one), and then they add things like FD&C colorings and other toxins (like horses care what color the stuff is??).

**Better idea:**

Provide our NTM salt free choice along with IZmine also free choice - remember the nifty 2 compartment mineral feeders available in the Free Choice Strater Pack and you will have the best possible natural salt/electrolyte available. The only time you might have to force electrolytes would be with a 100 mile endurance horse, then call me for ideas! And order the human NTM Salt for your own table, you will never eat the white stuff again!

## Myth #5: Horses don't need detoxification or digestive aids

Since we have taken away their ability to range and forage for natural detoxifying clays and herbs, and likewise to seek out digestion balancers (not to mention that we subject them to major blasts of chemical toxins in the form of wormers, preservatives, etc.), we need to address detoxification and digestion for them. Emotional and physical stress elicits a sympathetic gut response in horses. If you doubt this, watch what literally every horse does when you point him at a horse trailer or just after you load him - poops, of course. Chlorinated water and wormers also reduce the beneficial gut bacteria and hydrochloric acid level leaving the horse susceptible to parasite infestation (both worm eggs and protozoan varieties) and harmful bacteria like salmonella. Many horses are on total liver overload these days, and digestion becomes more compromised. Review my recent article on problem hooves for the connection between toxic liver and thyroid problems, too. Horses being wormed too frequently and fed lots of commercial feeds full of toxins can just get thinner and thinner, we have all seen the racer who is on 20 pounds of grain and is still greyhound thin and acidotic.

**Better ideas:**

Address digestion with Dyna-Pro whenever you have any sort of stress - emotional, physical, weather-related. This awesome product is a pH balancer and a gut bacteria "food" that encourages the proliferation of the beneficial microorganisms for optimum feed efficiency and protection against harmful bacteria. Address detoxification with free choice IZmine, and consider periodic feeding of Herbal Tonic or Excel.

Actually, Excel is my favorite for the "ADR" horses - those that just "ain't doin' right." Many times, less is more, and it is a great idea to occasionally back off the other supplements and "clean the slate" if the horse seems overloaded. I always do 3 days of Excel after a chemical worming, and Dyna-Pro as well.

**Bottom line:** If you are following the program as outlined, you will have a horse at optimum weight and glowing with health, and able to maintain winter weight and athletic endeavors, on economical amounts of feed.