

Feeding Your Horse: Laminitis-Prone Horses & Ponies

Target Audience: Insulin Resistance, Cushing's Disease, Predisposed Breed (Pony, Miniature Horse, Paso, Icelandic, Fjord), Obese.

Goal: Carb Control. Reduce sugars, starches and NSCs (non-structural carbohydrates) while providing necessary calories and nutrients.

Types of Carbs:

1. NSC – (non-structural) – simple sugars inside plant cells. Broken down in the stomach to cause a rapid rise in glucose, which stimulates release of the hormone insulin. Scientific research has directly linked high insulin release with laminitis. Foods high in NSC = corn, oats, barley, molasses.
2. Structural Carbs – cell wall of plants. Broken down in the cecum (fermentation vat) and large intestine. Do not cause spikes in blood glucose. Foods low in NSC = soybean hulls, rice bran, beet pulp (without added molasses), oil, hay meal, wheat middlings.

GRAZING: New grass and stressed grass (during droughts) is very high in sugar. Grazing muzzles or removal from grass is recommended during these periods.

HAY: Looks can be deceiving. The sugar content of hay can vary widely, even if it only contains grasses. The only way to know is to have a sample tested and analyzed for content. NSC = 10% or less is ideal for this group of horses.

One strategy is to soak hay for 30 minutes before serving, as this can reduce fructan (NSC) levels by 30%. Remove the water before feeding, since it now contains the sugar.

Also, Triple Crown Safe Starch bagged forage is guaranteed to have a low NSC and may be used to replace hay either partially or completely.

CONCENTRATES/GRAIN:

Obese horses require no grain. A vitamin/mineral supplement may be helpful. Purina Mills Nature's Essentials Born to Win is an excellent choice.

In more active horses, a greater caloric intake may be necessary. In grains, NSC should be 23% or less, clearly marked on the label. Typical sweet feed has NSC = 67%, oats = 55.7%, and corn = 79%. Some safe feeds are listed below:

1. Triple Crown Low Starch (NSC 15%)
2. Nutrena SafeChoice (NSC 21%)
3. Purina Well Solve L/S (NSC 11%)