



## Feeding the Veteran

Horses, like people all age at different rates with advances in veterinary medicine and nutrition along with improved care and management meaning that many horses are now living well into their 30's, whereas 20 years ago a late teenager was consider to be old.

### Top Tips For Veterans

- Six month dental check
- Regular flu and tetanus vaccinations
- Light exercise when possible
- Regular worming programme
- Adequate shelter and appropriate rugs
- Annual veterinary examination recommended

There are common problems seen in horses and ponies as they grow older, for example weight loss and mobility problems, but as a responsible owner we can manage and alleviate some of the conditions that bring on the aging process.

### Working Veterans

Just because a horse becomes older does not necessarily mean that its competitive working career is finished, with many older horses still leading very active lives. Regular work combined with every day turnout where possible will help the horse's general health and wellbeing. This work will also help keep their muscles toned and joints supple.

If you have a veteran that shows no specific age related problems and is still enjoying an active life then the main priority is to continue to feed a suitable ration according to bodyweight and workload. If you feel your veteran may benefit from a senior specific feed then there are many specialist feeds on the market designed to meet the requirements of the older horse, often supplying them with a number of additional nutrients.

Ideally senior specific feeds should have elevated nutrient levels to meet the nutritional needs of the veteran and may include Glucosamine HCL to help support joint mobility, Biotin to maintain healthy hooves, Yeasacc<sup>1026</sup> to help maintain gut health and high levels of Vitamin E to help support the immune system and maintain healthy antioxidant levels. Good protein



sources Lysine and Methionine should be used to support overall muscle tone and for the hard working veteran you need to ensure the higher energy requirements are met.

## Retired Veterans

For those veterans that are completely retired or just participate in some light hacking weight has to be carefully monitored, as it can quickly cause concern.

It is important to always remember to feed in accordance with breed and work. For example a newly retired thoroughbred that has had a hard working life will find it more difficult to 'switch off' and retirement may not come so easily. Here a low energy high fibre feed will be required but you must ensure that the diet contains adequate oils for condition.

For retired veterans that do lack condition it is important to allow them access to ad-lib forage such as good quality hay, haylage or grass. A high oil feed will help improve overall condition but it is important to remember when feeding a significant amount of oil to support the diet with correct nutrients, specifically antioxidants and vitamin E.

On the other hand a good doers weight will have to be closely monitored. For older horses and ponies that are over weight there are low calorie feeds available that will provide a balanced diet without further promoting weight gain. As long as the availability of the nutrients contained in these feeds is good they can be fed to the older horse or pony.

## Feeding Veterans With Specific Problems

Impaired chewing ability due to loss of teeth or poor tooth condition is one of the main reasons older horses start to lose weight.

It is recommended that older horses are fed a soft, leafy forage as the more stalky a forage looks the more indigestible material it will contain. However, if your horse is unable to eat hay then fibre should be provided through a hay replacer, fed alongside a concentrate feed.

Many older horses will also have a reduced appetite so it is important to offer your horse regular small feeds rather than one large feed, as this tends to be overwhelming.



Mobility issues are common in older horses, particular those that have had a hard working life. If you decided to feed a veteran specific feed a joint supplement should already be included as a prerequisite but there are a wide range of supplements available that can help with the discomfort.

Older horses will also tend to cough more which is probably because they have been exposed to dust throughout their life but by soaking hay for half an hour you can help minimise problems.