

fibre

fibre must be the base of all equine diets

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Healthy digestion

Fibre or roughage, is a carbohydrate found in the outer layers of plants. Horses have evolved to eat a diet based on fibre, and their digestive tract is designed to cater for this. Horses have a very small stomach which continually produces stomach acid. Most digestion occurs in the enormous hindgut (caecum and large intestine). Healthy bacteria and micro-organisms break down feed via the process of fermentation, and convert the fibre into usable energy.

This process is delicate - the hindgut environment can be affected by a number of other factors such as stress, antibiotic therapy, etc.

Why do horses need fibre?

1. Fibre provides a source of energy for horses.
2. Fibre provides 'gut fill', keeping the horse busy and reduces boredom.
3. Fibre can hold water in the horse's gut, which acts as a water reserve for when horses need it.
4. Chewing fibre increases saliva production, which buffers stomach acids.

What happens if a horse doesn't get enough fibre?

The energy provided by grains mainly comes from starch, which is primarily digested in the small intestine. However, large grain meals can overload this digestive capacity, and as a result some starch may escape breakdown and flow into the hindgut, fermenting rapidly and creating acidic conditions.

Clinically this may be shown as;

Loose droppings
colic
dehydration
laminitis
stomach ulcers due to reduced saliva
buffering

How much fibre do they need?

The rule of thumb is to feed at least 11.5% of your horse's body weight per day in roughage.

Roughages are feeds which are high in fibre (<20%). This means for the average 500kg horse you would feed at least 5- 7.5kg of roughages such as hay, chaff or pasture per day.

Remember this is a **minimum** per day

