



BLENDING NATURE AND TECHNOLOGY

**JULY 2015**

newsletter

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## ASK EQUUS

*Each month we will be featuring one of the most frequently asked questions on our Facebook page.*

**Question: "I think this is foremost on everybody's minds during winter but how can I keep my horse from losing condition during the colder months?"**

**Answer:**

As the cold weather hits us, this is often a big concern for many horse owners. But why do horses drop weight in the winter?

As long as a horse is healthy, has had its teeth checked and is wormed regularly, the most common reason for winter weight loss is generally the deterioration in the quality and quantity of grass combined with the horse using more energy to keep warm.

Horses will therefore need to consume more calories to account for this extra energy usage. This can be facilitated in several ways:

**1. Feeding more hay:**

Don't forget that in winter that "big round bale" that lasted several days in your paddock in summer may not last as long as horses will generally consume more during this time and therefore more hay will need to be provided.

It may also be worth looking into a higher quality of grass or you could simply supplement your normal hay ration with something of higher nutritional value such as Lucerne.

If hay is in short supply, then adding additional roughage in the form of a hay cube can be beneficial. The **Equus Nice 'n Easy** cube can be functional here.

**2. Feeding more concentrate feed:**

This should only be considered if all the above has been addressed. Since the horse expends more energy to keep warm, more energy/calories need to be supplied and so an increase in feed may be all that is needed to keep weight on the horse. Alternatively, rather than increasing the quantities, it may be better to change to a higher calorie/energy feed which allows meal sizes to remain small facilitating more efficient digestion thereby allowing the horse to get more from the feed.

## Testimonials

Dear Equus

I thought id send you a picture of my **Equus Lucerne Cube** loving horse, Cellehof Adamant.

Adam is a big old softy and really loves his Lucerne cubes. I find them extremely handy and far less wasteful than baled Lucerne. I use them as a roughage additive and I often have a couple in my pocket to use as treats.

Thank you for a wonderful product.  
Anine Swart



As part of this year's Mandela Day, Equus donated 67 bags of Equus to the Eastern Cape Horse Care Unit.

This unit was founded in 2006 to provide education to horse and donkey owners in the Nelson Mandela metro, along with providing care for animals in need.

Equus is proud to be a part of such a wonderful cause, and we thank all the staff at the ECHCU for providing such wonderful support. Thank you also to Feed and Seed, PE for delivering this precious cargo.



## But I don't want my horse to be hot:

This is one of the main concerns when more feed is needed for weight maintenance or gain. It is important to be realistic here, however, as over the winter months other factors can contribute to "hot" behaviour. A change in workload and increased stable time may well result in a horse being a little fresher than normal. However, there are steps to assist in reducing the risk of over-excitability behaviour.

Firstly, introduce a higher energy/calorie feed slowly. Suddenly providing a horse with more energy/calories in their diet will increase the likelihood of "excitability". Secondly, the type of energy source provided is an important aspect.

Feeds based on 'slow-release' energy sources such as fibre and fat, release energy gradually and are less likely to promote hot behaviour compared to sources of 'quick-release' energy such as starch from cereal grains or sugars from molasses. It is thus important that the feed used is high in fat and fibre sources. The added bonus of this way of feeding is that it is far friendlier on the gut and can even help horses prone to colic and gastric ulcers.

The entire Equus range is built on this principle of high fibre and fats, low sugars and grains which means you can always choose the best product for each individual horse. My recommendation, however, for horses prone to weight loss or hot behaviour would be **Equus Cool 'n Perform 12%**.

Further, rug your horse up if the weather is cold at night and during the day. This will help them to conserve a little energy and save those precious calories.



# Horse Play- are stable toys worth buying?

*Article adapted from Dr Nancy Diehl, VMD, MS*

You may have seen large displays of stable toys for horses in many tack shops, but are these purchases really worth while?

“Well, it can be really beneficial to give stabled horses something to do, says Dr Diehl”. “The problem with “toys,” either commercial or hand-made, is that horses can become habituated to them pretty quickly. That is, the novelty factor wears off and they ignore them. Some people recommend rotating stable toys so that the novelty remains but, in general, I think toy use is pretty variable and other changes to your management may be more useful”

What we’re really talking about when providing a “toy” is environmental enrichment. The objective of environmental enrichment is to increase the complexity and diversity of the animal’s environment to improve physical and behavioral well-being.

There is a two-pronged approach to environmental enrichment for animals: one is to create a naturalistic habitat and the other is to devise activities. Toys were the first rather primitive approach, but today the objective is to provide things for the animals to do that mimic what they would be doing in the wild, such as searching for food, for example.

We can take this same approach with our domestic horses. Clearly the best environmental enrichment for horses is the most natural housing and feeding management as possible. However where horses live mostly in stables and get individual paddock turnout, we can still provide objects that help encourage natural behaviours.

Edible enrichment is probably the most studied and most likely to be beneficial. Foraging toys have therefore been shown to be more useful. These are generally plastic balls/containers into which hay pellets or cubes are placed and the horse moves it around so the food drops out intermittently.



A similar effect might also be gained by simply dispersing the horse’s ration of forage around his living area. Studies have shown that providing multiple types of forages keeps horses more occupied than a single forage type. In other farm animal species, researchers have looked at using complex systems where animals have to complete a task or respond to specific stimuli in order to get feed.

Tactile enrichment may also be considered, that is, providing substrates against which the horse can rub and/or scratch. There are some commercial products that can be wrapped around posts on which horses like to scratch and textured objects which can be hung from the stable to further facilitate tactile enrichment.



Visual enrichment has also been shown to be beneficial and this can simply be having a broad field of view to be able to see neighbours in other stables. Studies have shown that even just the sight of other horses, without direct physical contact, can have positive effects on stabled horses and mirrors for horses that are weavers have also been shown to have beneficial effects.

Environmental enrichment also includes any exercise, as well as the tasks asked of horses when they are ridden or handled. Positive daily interactions that ask the horse to do something have been shown to have benefits even for captive wild animals. Left to their own devices, horses will learn how to move or manipulate things to get something rewarding. In some species it has been shown that a more "cognitively interesting" environment improves an animal's ability to learn.

So some horses will play with a toy that they can kick, pick up, roll, or toss. But most would encourage looking into other objects or activities that simulate natural behaviours or things that they would more likely encounter in a natural environment. These things are more likely to keep the horse's interest over time and may reduce the amount of stereotypes seen in some horses.

*Taken from <http://www.thehorse.com/articles/35959/are-stall-toys-good-for-horses>*

Karen Keller

## Schooling Success



Karen is a Protea Dressage rider and National Champion, who is highly regarded in her field. When Karen is not schooling her own horses, she spends a lot of time teaching up and coming riders at Kellandstables, as well as at their home yards.

In this new series, Karen will be sharing her schooling "top tips" to help you and your horse in your everyday riding.

### **This month we look at Spooking**

Spooking is such a common thing with horses but I have found the more 'on your aids' a horse is, the less lightly it is to spook!

Here are some tips that have stood me in good stead with spooky horses.

- 1: Never punish or shout at your horse during a spook!
- 2: Don't pat or reward them when they are spooking.
- 3: Reward or praise them for not spooking or being brave and going forward.
- 4: Expose them to scary things in a horse friendly way to desensitize them.
- 5: Slow down and walk past scary things and then move forward again past the problem (This can be likened to jumping where you don't go faster into a fence to prevent stopping at the fence).
- 6: Flex your horse away from the problem, don't pull him towards it.
- 7: Watch your horse's ears. If they are forward too long it's an early warning that he is about to spook.
- 8: Follow moving things e.g carriages, bicycles. I often follow the tractor around when it is grading my arena.
- 9: Try talking to your horse and focus on your own breathing and relaxing yourself so that you can be a calming influence on your horse.

Happy Riding

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## Contact Us

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**For an absolutely free consultation with no further obligation contact our professional consultants to schedule a visit to your yard.**

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