

# Nutrition

## Right From the Start



EQUINE GUELPH  
helping horses for life

It is no surprise that nutrition plays an enormous role in the health of a foal. Meeting a foal's nutritional requirements is necessary to ensure proper growth and bone development.

### In Utero

The health of the foal begins with the mare. Ensuring your broodmare's nutritional needs are met is critical. Calories, protein, vitamins and minerals are all passed on to the foal while in utero, and later through the mare's milk.

- Broodmares should maintain a body score of 5.5 to 6.5 throughout their pregnancy.
- Pregnant mares will need more calories to maintain a good weight – they are eating for two!
- Insufficient mineral intake could negatively impact the mare's bone and liver stores.
- A lack of protein will cause the mare to lose muscle mass, noticeable first in the topline.

### The First 24 Hours

It is vital that foals receive colostrum within the first 24 hours of life. Colostrum, or First Milk, provides the foal with protein and with the antibodies that will enable the foal to fight off infections.

- A foal should receive 250 ml of colostrum per 100 pounds of body weight, every hour for the first six hours of life.
- Colostrum is necessary to “kick start” the foal's immune system.
- Breeders should have access to a supply of frozen colostrum, in the event the foal is not able to suckle from its mother during this crucial time period.



photo: DON KAPPER

### The First 30 Days to Three Months

During this period foals will drink seven to ten times per hour. This is unchanged whether the foal is drinking from its mother or from a bucket (such as in the case of an orphan foal).

- Drinking frequently helps to prevent digestive upsets like diarrhea and colic.
- Foals should never go more than 2 hours without drinking.
- Eating forage (hay and straw) or concentrated feed should be discouraged at this time.
- Monitor the mare to ensure she is maintaining weight and able to produce enough milk to sustain the foal.

### Three to Four Months

At this stage, foals can begin eating forage and concentrated feed. Test your hay and carefully select a concentrated feed in order to ensure all nutritional requirements are filled.

- Feed the softest hay possible
- Select a concentrate specifically for weanlings

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If you would like to learn more, please read Equine Guelph's article '[Nutrition Right From the Start](#)'. Always contact a trusted equine professional or veterinarian if you are concerned about your horse's diet or health. Equine Guelph offers [12-week online courses](#) in Equine Nutrition, Advanced Equine Health through Nutrition and Growth and Development.

**Bio:** Don Kapper is a highly experienced equine nutritionist and a member of the Cargill Equine Enterprise Team. Don graduated from Ohio State University and achieved his credentials as a Professional Animal Scientist from the American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists in 1996 and has been a sought-after speaker for equine meetings in both the U.S. and Canada. He was a member of the "Performance Electrolyte Research" team at the University of Guelph and wrote the chapter on "Applied Nutrition" for the authoritative veterinary textbook: "Equine Internal Medicine", 2nd edition.

Don also co-developed the "Equine Nutrition" course for the Equine Science Certificate program for Equine Guelph and has been a popular guest speaker in several Equine Guelph online courses, including the Equine Growth and Development, Exercise Physiology and Advanced Equine Nutrition. Learn more about online courses for horse caregivers at the [Equine Guelph education web page](#).

