



## Horse Care Info Sheet

## Grazing Muzzles

Grazing muzzles are meant to restrict pasture intake, but not prevent the animal from eating.

**They can be useful for:**

- Horses and ponies that need to lose weight or those at risk for becoming overweight
- Horses and ponies with metabolic conditions and/or those at high risk of developing metabolic conditions (e.g. pony breeds)
- Pastures that are very lush (i.e. that contain high-calorie forages) and/or any newly growing pastures (e.g. during the spring and fall)
- If there are no other options to restrict pasture access, such as moving to a new property with only one turnout area

**Take these points into consideration before using a grazing muzzle:**

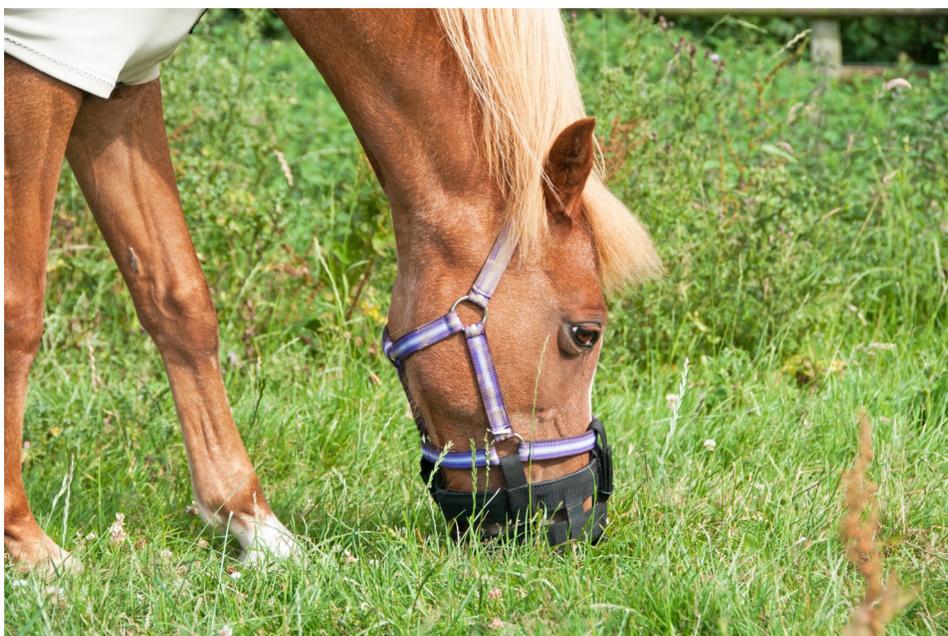
- Grazing muzzles can affect herd dynamics, so be aware that you may need to make changes to turnout groups.
- Animals need to have time without the muzzle on so think about what schedule you might use.
- The length of the grass can affect how easy it is to use the muzzle, which may mean work in pasture management. Long grass can bend under the muzzle, while short grass may not protrude far enough through the muzzle opening. Grass under 10cm in length was most easily grasped in one study.

**Keep the following tips in mind when choosing a grazing muzzle:**

- There are different types of grazing muzzles so look at your options to decide what might work for your horse.
- Know your horse's bit size, as some use bit sizing as size guidelines.
- Ask your veterinarian and/or equine nutritionist to see what types are available in your area, and what they have success with.
- Look for research studies that provide evidence for the product's claims. Reach out to the company if needed.
- Look for any satisfaction guarantees or warranty information.

## Keep this in mind when introducing a grazing muzzle:

- Ensure the muzzle fits properly. The company should provide instructions on fit. You may be able to send pictures in so they can double check the fit.
- Make sure that the muzzle has proper airflow and isn't causing any breathing issues.
- Make sure the horse is accustomed to the muzzle by observing their behaviour (e.g. are they comfortable drinking water?) and herd dynamics. Be sure that the animal is still consuming enough water when it's on and that the muzzle doesn't cause any issues while drinking (e.g. retaining water in the muzzle).
- When you are first introducing the muzzle, do not turn the animal out with the muzzle on for long periods of time without supervision (no more than 1 – 2 hours), especially if there is a medical reason for needing it or if the animal is not accustomed to pasture. If the horse gets the muzzle off while unsupervised, they can gorge on the grass which will increase the risk of colic and/or laminitis.
- As a general rule, animals should wear grazing muzzles for no longer than 10 – 12 hours at a time. Check with the company for individual guidelines. Always monitor the fit and look for signs of rubbing/irritation.
- Inspect and clean the muzzle regularly. Watch out for mold developing and/or debris build up.
- Monitor the animal's body condition score and topline score to be sure that they are still getting an adequate amount of calories and protein.



## Keep these tips in mind when creating a schedule for use:

- The [concentration of sugars](#) in pasture is generally lowest early in the morning and increases as the day goes on, peaking during the afternoon. Consider using the muzzle during periods when sugars are high. Keep in mind that the low periods may still be too high for animals with metabolic conditions.
- Horses and ponies are very good at making up for lost grazing time, so use of a grazing muzzle while on grass turn out combined with dry lot turnout when the muzzle is off may be more successful.
- Some animals will not attempt to eat pasture at all with the muzzle on. If this happens, do not use the muzzle for long periods as horses need frequent forage-based meals to keep their digestive tract functioning, and a minimum of 1.5% of their body weight in dry matter intake of forage each day.

**Keep this in mind if you are considering using the grazing muzzle in cases where the animal has 24/7 access to hay during winter months:**

- Contact the company to ask if the grazing muzzle has been successfully used with hay. If so, follow the company's guidance.
- If not, consider purchasing slow feed hay nets or feeders or separating your herd based on nutritional needs.
- If you are using the muzzle for this purpose, be sure to first have an idea of 1) whether the horse can eat hay with the muzzle on and 2) how much hay the horse is able to eat. Horses should not go more than 4 hours without a forage-based feed and need a minimum of 1.5% of their body weight in dry matter intake of forage each day.

**Alternatives to grazing muzzles include:**

- Using a dry lot. Dry lots can be created by portioning off an area of an existing paddock and can double as a sacrifice area. Slow feeders and puzzle feeders, like hay balls, can help occupy animals turned out on dry lots.
- Use of grazing strategies like strip grazing or the leader/follower approach, where animals with higher nutritional needs are allowed to graze first.

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