

# The Growing Foal



A healthy foal will grow rapidly, gaining up to 90% of its adult height in the first two years of life. Getting a foal's growth rate and development right during this time is essential for providing the foal with the best possible start for an athletic career.

There are many different factors that will affect a foal's start in life, but the ones that we can control and manage include:

- appropriate diet for age and stage of growth
- de-worming
- preventive vaccination program
- farriery.

## Feeding the Growing Foal

The nutrition of a new born foal will come entirely from the mare's milk. By two months of age the mare's milk alone may not provide enough nutrition and supplementary feeding may be required.

It is important to remember that every foal is different. There are many factors that will affect a foal's development, including genetic, environmental and nutritional factors. It is therefore important to constantly assess and monitor the foal and adjust their nutrition accordingly. Growth rates that are either too rapid or too slow can affect a foal's long term development.

Once supplementary feeding is required, it is important to make sure that the ration is balanced in vitamins and minerals. This can be done by feeding good quality roughage (hay and pasture) and by using a specially balanced feed suitable for the foal's age. Foals have relatively small stomachs, so this ration should be split into several feeds and fed two to three times daily.

Foals can be weaned at five to six months of age. Supplementary (creep) feeding should be introduced one month prior to weaning to allow the gut to adapt to a non-milk diet.

**Developmental orthopaedic conditions** that have been associated with a rapid growth rate include:

- contracted tendons
- epiphysitis (growth plate inflammation)
- angular imb deformities (bent legs)
- osteochondrosis (OCD - abnormal joint cartilage growth).

## WORMING

Appropriate worming is important to help ensure optimal growth and health. Intestinal parasite infestations can not only lead to a foal failing to thrive, but in severe cases can lead to irreversible gut damage, severe illness and death.

## WORMING KEY POINTS:

- start de-worming treatment from four weeks of age;
- worm every four weeks until six months of age;
- use only preparations that are safe in young foals (see package);
- at six months of age, start on an adult worming program along with the rest of the herd.

### Vaccinations

A foal receives antibodies from the mare's colostrum in the first 24 hours of life. These provide vital protection whilst the foal is developing its own immunity. These antibodies will include protection against diseases the mare has been exposed to naturally and to those that the mare has been vaccinated against.

Maternal (the mare's) antibodies slowly decline and will stop providing effective immunity for the foal after the first few months. It is therefore recommended that foals are vaccinated at an early age. The timing of this first vaccination is very important. Waiting until the foal is six months old will help to ensure that the maternal antibodies do not interfere with the vaccination and prevent the foal from forming effective immunity.

In foals born from unvaccinated mares, however, tetanus can be given from as early as four months of age, to provide appropriate tetanus cover sooner. In this country we also routinely vaccinate foals against Equine Influenza from six months of age.



### FARRIERY

Regular foot trimming is important for normal development of a foal's limbs and feet, the timing of the first trim will vary between foals. A foal should be assessed at an early age for limb deformities.

**Flexural limb deformities** are seen when the limb is viewed from the side and usually indicate a shortening or contraction of the tendons, leading to over flexion of the lower limb joints.



**Angular limb deformities** are seen when standing in front of the foal, with the lower limb either deviating inwards or outwards from the midline.



Treatment is more successful when started promptly and in younger foals. A foal with good conformation should undergo routine trimming from about six months of age.



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