

How a mare's nutritional needs vary during lactation

A **nursing mare** has much higher nutritional demands than a mare that is open, pregnant early, or resting. The reason is simple: **lactation** requires a steady stream of nutrients, especially calories, amino acids, minerals, and water. During this **lactation stage**, the mare's **calorie requirements** go up and her **protein** needs grow so she can maintain body condition while supporting the foal.

The feeding goal is not just to "give more." The goal is to build a **complete feeding plan** that supports **body condition upkeep**, proper milk output, and **digestive health**. A mare that is underfed may lose condition, while one that gets too much **horse feed grain** too quickly may face digestive trouble. For that reason, the best plan usually starts with high-quality forage and then adds concentrated **horse feed** only as needed.

The mare's **forage-based diet** should remain the foundation. Good hay or pasture provides **easily digested fiber**, which helps keep the hindgut stable. Once forage is covered, the next questions are about the mare's **body condition score**, milk output, and whether the current ration supplies enough calories and nutrients. If the mare is dropping weight or looks ribby, the diet may need more digestible energy, more **dietary protein**, or both.

Ideal horse feed selections for a mare in lactation

Many **horse feed varieties** that can be suitable for a nursing mare, but the right choice depends on forage quality, milk production demands, and how well the mare maintains condition. In general, a feed for lactation should be palatable, nutrient-dense, and straightforward to balance with hay or pasture.

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A common choice is a commercial mare feed or a senior feed designed for higher nutrient density. These products often contain more digestible fiber, added fat, and a stronger vitamin and mineral package than basic grain. That makes them more beneficial than plain oats or a simple sweet mix when the mare needs more support without overloading on starch.

Sweet feed for horses is still used by many owners because horses often like the taste. Its **palatability** can help picky eaters clean up meals. However, sweet feed is not automatically the best option for a lactating mare. Some formulas are high in **non-structural carbohydrates** and lower in fiber than ideal. If the mare needs more calories, a feed with added fat and fiber may be a better match than a high-starch mix.

When comparing **horse feed**, look closely at the **nutrition label**. You want a product that supports milk, maintains condition, and fits the rest of the ration. The most useful feeds for lactation usually provide moderate protein, balanced minerals, and enough energy to support daily intake without encouraging digestive upset.

Feeding amounts for a lactating mare each day

How much she needs depends on forage quality, the mare's [Get the facts](#) size, the foal's age, and her current body condition. A basic **horse feeding chart** is a useful starting point, but it should never take the place of observation. The best guide is the mare herself: her ribs, topline, energy level, manure consistency, and overall milk output.

To figure out **how much grain to feed a horse per day**, begin with forage. Most mares do best when they receive free-choice or near free-choice hay, or access to adequate pasture, before grain is added. If forage is limited or poor in quality, a higher-density concentrate may be needed. If forage is excellent, the mare may need only a modest amount of concentrate to meet her needs.

A useful rule is to set meal size moderate and spread concentrate across multiple feedings. Large meals of grain can increase the chance of digestive trouble. If the mare is losing condition, increase calories gradually and reassess her **body condition score** every week or two. If she is holding steady and the foal is thriving, the ration may already be working.

Because the mare's needs change across the **lactation stage**, daily intake should be adjusted over time. Early lactation often requires more support than later lactation. A mare nursing a rapidly growing foal may need more feed than one with an older foal that is beginning to nibble forage. This is where a practical feeding plan matters more than a one-size-fits-all answer.

How to choose between commercial mare feeds and grain mixes

Mare-specific commercial feeds can simplify ration balancing because they are built to support reproduction and milk production. Brands such as **purina horse feed**, **tribute horse feed**, **nutrena horse feed**, and **triumph horse feed** all offer products that may be useful depending on the mare's condition, forage quality, and workload. The right option is the feed that matches the whole ration, not merely the label.

Many horse owners compare options like **purina horse feed** or **purina impact horse feed** because they want a feed that supports both condition and production. A major-brand mare feed may provide controlled starch, digestible fiber, added fat, and a stronger mineral package than a homemade grain mix. That can be helpful if you want consistency and easier balancing.

By contrast, grain mixes can be less predictable. Some deliver plenty of calories but too few trace minerals or essential amino acids. Others may be suitable for horses in maintenance but not ideal for a mare that is producing milk. The mare's diet should still focus on forage, with concentrate used to fill real nutrient gaps instead of just adding bulk.

If you are reading labels from different brands, compare protein, fat, fiber, and mineral content. The best feed should support milk production and body condition without requiring too much grain. In many cases, a better-quality commercial ration is easier to manage than a basic grain mix because it reduces guesswork.

When to use performance rations or weight gain rations

Sometimes the best option is not a mare-specific formula but a higher-calorie feed. Products such as **purina impact performance**, **purina performance horse feed**, and similar performance rations can make sense when a mare is struggling to maintain weight. These feeds often provide more energy density, more fat, and a stronger nutrient profile than standard maintenance feeds.

If the mare is underweight, has a low **body condition score**, or is producing a lot of milk, a higher-calorie feed may be beneficial. The **best horse feed for weight gain** is usually one that increases calorie intake without creating digestive upset. That often means more easily digested fiber and fat, not just more starch. In those cases, a performance feed may be more appropriate than a plain grain mix.

That said, performance feeds are not automatically the right answer for every nursing mare. If the mare already holds condition and is eating excellent forage, you may not need as much extra energy. The smartest approach is to match the ration to the mare's actual needs, not to choose the most calorie-dense product available.

What components and dietary factors matter most

When assessing **horse feed** for a lactating mare, the nutrient profile matters more than the brand name. Several key nutrients deserve attention: **protein**, **calcium**, **phosphorus**, **omega-3 fatty acids**, and overall mineral balance. Together, these promote milk quality, bone development in the foal, and the mare's own condition.

Protein supports tissue repair and the amino acid supply needed for milk. But more protein is not always better if the overall ration is unbalanced. The **protein level** should be appropriate for lactation and paired with enough energy. If a mare gets adequate protein but not enough calories, her body may still lose weight.

Calcium and **phosphorus** are especially important because milk contains both. The **calcium to phosphorus ratio** should remain balanced across the total ration, not just in the concentrate. Forage contributes minerals too, so the whole diet needs review. Good commercial feeds are often designed to help maintain that balance.

Omega-3 fatty acids and added fat can improve calorie density and may support overall condition. They can be especially useful when you want to raise energy intake without overloading starch. Many feeds also include added **vitamins** and **minerals** to support immune function and reproductive needs. A well-designed mare ration should provide those nutrients in sensible amounts, not excess.

Nourishing errors to watch for in nursing mares

One common error is changing the ration too abruptly. **Rapid feed changes** can disrupt the hindgut and increase the risk of **stomach upset**. If you need to switch feeds, do it gradually over several days. That lets the microbiome to adjust and helps protect **intestinal health**.

Feeding excess grain is another typical mistake. More supplement is not always better, especially if the mare is already getting enough calories from roughage. Excess grain may boost the risk of loose manure, poor appetite, or **colic danger**. The safest approach is to add feed in measured steps and keep meal sizes moderate.

Another issue is forgetting that forage matters most. A mare that is short on hay or pasture may need a different concentrate strategy than a mare on excellent forage. If forage intake is inadequate, a concentrated feed alone will not solve the problem. The ration should sustain her as a whole, not rely on grain to do all the work.

How to compare horse feed brands and store-bought options

Shoppers often compare the **best horse feed brands** with the **worst horse feed brands** without reviewing the actual product. That can be misleading. A brand may have a great option for broodmares and a less suitable one for easy keepers. The real question is whether the specific feed fits the mare's needs.

In-store choices such as **tractor supply horse feed**, **runnings horse feed**, and even **chewy horse feed** listings can be easy to buy, but convenience should not replace label reading. Examine the guaranteed analysis, ingredient list, and feeding directions. Look at digestible fiber, fat, protein, and mineral levels, and look at whether the feed is intended for reproduction, growth, maintenance, or performance.

Some feeds are more economical but lower in nutrient density. Others cost more yet require smaller feeding amounts because they are more concentrated. The best choice depends on total ration cost, forage quality, and how well the mare maintains condition. A feed that looks inexpensive per bag may be costly if you have to feed a lot of it.

Can sweet feed or pellets be used safely?

Yes, but only if they fit the mare's needs and are introduced properly. **Sweet feed for horses** can work for some mares, especially if they need better **palatability** and the formula is not overly high in starch. **tractor supply sweet feed** may be a practical option for some barns, but it is important to compare the label with other **horse feed grain** products before deciding.

Pellets can also be a good choice because they are easy to measure and often provide more consistent nutrition than mixed grain. The safest option is usually whichever feed supports the mare's energy needs, keeps meals moderate, and complements the forage rather than replacing it.

Cost factors when feeding a lactating mare

Feed expenses matters, particularly when a mare is in the first weeks of lactation and eating above her usual level. The real question is not just the bag price but the total **horse feed cost** over a month. A feed that costs more per bag may still be efficient if it is nutrient-dense and uses a smaller daily amount.

A **horse feed cost calculator** can help you weigh products based on daily feeding rate, bag size, and price. It makes comparison simpler to estimate **how much does horse feed cost** per day rather than just per bag. When you compare feeds, factor in the cost of hay or pasture management too, because **forage** is the core of the ration.

For mares needing extra calories, the **best horse feed for weight gain** is not always the cheapest option upfront. The best value is often a feed that supports condition, milk production, and digestive stability without requiring large amounts of grain. In that sense, quality and nutrient density can lower hidden costs linked to poor condition or ration imbalance.

Extras, supplements, and treats

Simple treats can be fine in moderation. **Feeding horses carrots** is usually acceptable for a healthy mare, but treats should not replace actual nutrition. A few carrots or small treats are not the issue; the problem is when extras begin to unbalance the diet or encourage too many sugary snacks.

A **vitamin/mineral supplement** may help if the forage and concentrate do not fully cover the mare's needs. That said, many commercial mare feeds already contain enough added nutrients, so a separate supplement is not always necessary. Always check what is already in the ration before adding more **minerals** or **vitamins**.

Salt is essential and often overlooked. Free-choice salt or a measured salt intake supports water consumption and normal body function, both of which matter during lactation. Fresh water is just as important as feed because milk production depends heavily on hydration. In most cases, the combination of quality **forage**, a balanced concentrate, salt, and clean water does more for a nursing mare than fancy extras.

The best ration plan for a lactating mare usually starts with excellent forage, then adds the appropriate concentrate only as needed to maintain body condition, boost milk production, and keep the ration balanced.

FAQ

What is the best horse feed for a lactating mare?

The best **horse feed** for a lactating mare is one that promotes milk production, supports body condition, and fits the rest of the ration. Select a balanced mare feed or a high-quality performance-style feed with enough energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals, while keeping forage as the foundation.

How much grain should a lactating mare eat per day?

The amount is influenced by forage quality, body condition score, and how much milk the mare is producing. There is no single answer to **how much grain to feed a horse per day**, but the safest approach is to first provide forage, then add concentrate in moderate meals and adjust based on condition and manure quality.

Is sweet feed for horses a good choice for nursing mares?

Sweet feed for horses can be used safely in some cases, but it is not always the best choice. It may be useful if the mare needs better palatability, but a higher-fiber, lower-starch feed is often a better fit for digestive health and consistent energy during lactation.

Should I use a performance feed or mare-specific feed?

Use the feed that most closely matches the mare's condition and nutrient needs. A mare-specific feed is often ideal for reproduction and milk support, while a performance feed can help if she needs more calories or is losing weight. Products like **purina impact performance** or **purina performance horse feed** may be useful when extra energy is needed.

What supplements or treats are safe for a lactating mare?

Safe extras usually include small amounts of treats like **feeding horses carrots**, plus salt and water. A **vitamin/mineral supplement** may be helpful only if the existing ration is lacking. Always evaluate the full diet first, because many commercial feeds already provide the needed nutrients.