



CALORIES, CALORIES, CALORIES!

Sooner or later, the issue of calories is bound to work its way to the fore. You have calculated your horse's ounces of **HorseSense** based on his ideal weight, so his nutrition is taken care of. Now, how do you calculate his calorie needs? Is he going to need some grain? If so, how much? Generally speaking, once he has swallowed it a calorie is a calorie, whether it comes from the pasture or out of your feed room. So you have to look at everything that goes into his mouth. Your horse will use these calories in different ways.

His body's first priority will be to fuel the functions of his organs. The beating of a heart burns calories. The process of digestions burns calories. All of his body mechanisms burn calories. If he does not get enough calories to do these jobs, his body will turn on itself and start breaking down his own muscle for fuel – an anorexic condition. It won't matter how many vitamins and minerals he gets if the body does not receive enough calories. Start by looking at the horse. Is he fat? Is he thin? Does his weight look good?

THE FAT HORSE: He has excess fat on his rump, behind the shoulder and the ribs cannot be found. The first thing to cut out is any grains he is receiving. If his obesity comes from a pasture or a too ample supply of hay, you need to limit his access. Now here's the danger; if he goes for more than 5 or 6 daytime hours (nighttime 6-8) without some roughage running through his system, his intestinal function becomes compromised and he becomes a prime candidate for ulcers. Try to keep some grass hay on hand as grass hays tend to contain only 1-2% fat and most importantly, far less carbohydrates than legume hays. Hay harvested the previous year does not taste as good; therefore, he should pick at it slowly, eat less, and get fewer calories from it. Another benefit is the roughage mixed with his saliva moving through his system will assist in keeping it healthy. You can give him a 3 pound flake each time, and that will keep him going while depriving him of access to pasture edibles.

THE THIN HORSE: He may have ribs showing just under the skin, but so may a fit horse. Assess your horse's muscle mass by looking at the rump first. Does it look nicely rounded? The muscles should round from the hip bones to the point of the rump. If it has a tent-like shape with flat muscling, then he is too thin. Along his back, the muscles should bury his spine, never drop away from the backbone. With proper nutrients, even an old horse in his twenties or thirties can have great muscle mass and a youthful topline rather than flat, flaccid or fatty tissues. The shoulders too should look well-muscled. If they look flat and bony he is too thin. If this is his condition, then we can probably assume that his neck muscling is flat and unimpressive as well. This horse needs better nutrition (minerals and vitamins) and more calories than he is currently getting.

ABOUT OATS: Using oats as an additional source of calories is great because of the quality protein and balanced amino acids they contain. Oats are a great way to build muscle rather than fat. Another reason oats is preferred to barley, corn, etc. is that they are digested pre-caecally avoiding hind gut fermentation (a major factor in colic, high lactic acid blood levels, laminitis and tying up). It is harder and takes longer to put weight on a horse than it does to take it off (in fact it is usually more expensive than growing a foal), so do not be afraid to attack the problem by steadily but substantially increasing his caloric intake. Remember, his body will first use the additional calories and protein inside his body before you see any change on the outside. A HorseSense horse is different from those fed standard horse feeds, when you build a HorseSense horse their nutrient pack remains constant but his calorie content will fluctuate.

**Check out more information on the benefits of oats at <http://www.equineoats.org/default.aspx?page=3>*