

What stalled horses need from their diet

Stalled horses need a **forage-first** diet built around steady intake of **forage**, because their digestive system is designed to process roughage for long periods rather than large meals of rich feed. The foundation should usually be **forage hay** or **wrapped forage**, depending on what suits the horse and the quality available. The aim is to support **digestive health**, maintain healthy **fibre** intake, and reduce the risk of boredom, stress, and digestive upset.

For horses kept in stalls, forage does more than fill the belly. It encourages saliva production, supports **gut health**, and helps maintain a stable digestive environment. Good-quality fibre is especially important because stalled horses often have less movement and may have a more limited feeding routine than horses living out. That makes consistent roughage intake even more important.

The best horse feed for a stalled horse is rarely just “more feed”. It is the right balance of forage, water, and any supplementary feed needed to meet **calorie demands**, protein needs, and **nutrient balance**. In many cases, the base diet should prioritise hay or haylage first, with additional **horse feed** only if the horse needs extra condition, performance support, or targeted nutrients.

A stalled horse that is idle or lightly worked may need very little concentrate. A horse in harder **training load** may need a more **nutrient-dense** ration, but even then the best approach is still usually fibre-led. Look for digestible fibre, moderate **protein**, controlled **starch content**, and sensible **sugar levels**.

Leading types of horse feed for horses kept in stalls

There are a number of **types of horse feed** that can suit stalled horses, but they do different jobs. The right option depends on whether the horse needs weight support, managed energy, added vitamins and minerals, or support for particular work demands. In most stalled horses, the best choice is one that works alongside forage rather than substitutes for it.

A **complete horse feed** is designed to offer a broad nutrient profile in one product. Some are intended to be fed with little or no additional balancer, while others still work best alongside ample forage. These feeds can be practical if a horse is fussy, if stable management needs making easier, or if you want a more simple feeding routine.

A **horse feed mix** usually combines cereals, fibre sources, and other ingredients to supply energy and palatability. These can be useful for horses needing more calories, but they may also contain a higher starch level. That makes them less suitable for horses that are prone to sharp behaviour, digestive sensitivity, or weight gain.

Bifid UK

+44 800 422 0888

sales@bifid.co.uk

<https://bifid.com/uk/>

Concentrates are higher in energy than forage and are used to top up the diet where hay or haylage alone is not enough. However, concentrates should be chosen carefully. For stalled horses, a fibre-rich conditioning feed is often better to a cereal-heavy option, especially when the goal is controlled weight gain or support for light to moderate work.

If you are comparing feeds, think in terms of what the horse actually needs:

- More fibre and chewing time
- Managed calories for maintaining or gaining weight
- Reduced to moderate starch for calmer behaviour and better gut stability
- Added vitamins and minerals if forage alone is not enough
- Good taste without leaning too much on sugar or starch

A practical **horse feed mix recipe** at home should still follow the same principles: build around forage-based ingredients, avoid loading the ration with extra energy, and keep the overall diet balanced. If you are unsure, an **equine nutritionist** can help you build a sensible ration around the horse's needs.

Choosing the best feed by workload, age, and condition

The right horse feed depends on the horse's age, body type, current **workload**, and **body condition score**. A stalled horse may lose condition through stress, poor appetite, or insufficient forage, but another may become overweight from too much concentrate and too little movement. That is why a feed choice should always start with assessment, not trial and error.

A **horse feeding chart** is useful for setting a starting point. It helps you estimate ration size based on bodyweight, work level, and whether the horse is staying at, gaining, or losing weight. A **horse feed calculator uk** can also be useful for planning daily intake, but these tools should be used alongside hands-on observation and, where needed, professional guidance.

Body condition score is one of the simplest and most reliable ways to decide whether the current ration is working. If ribs are too visible, muscle is lacking, or top-line is poor, the horse may need more calories, better-quality forage, or a more suitable conditioning feed. If the horse is carrying excess fat, the ration may need reducing, particularly where starch or unnecessary supplementary feed is involved.

Age matters too. Young horses may need more support for growth, while older horses may need easier-to-chew fibre and better digestibility. The same feed may not suit both. A horse in light hacking may do well on forage and a balancer, while a horse in regular schooling or jumping may need additional calories and protein.

Use this framework when deciding what to feed:

- **Light workload:** forage first, with a balancer if vitamins and minerals are lacking
- **Moderate workload:** fibre-based feed with extra calories if needed
- **Hard workload:** more energy-dense but still controlled in starch
- **Poor condition:** improve forage quality first, then add a conditioning feed if required
- **Easy keeper:** restrict unnecessary calories and focus on nutrient density rather than bulk

If you are unsure, an equine nutritionist can assess the overall ration and help you fine-tune the **daily ration** based on bodyweight and work.

Feeding rules for horses every owner should follow

Good **horse feeding rules** are important for stalled horses because consistency matters. The digestive tract is built for frequent intake of roughage, not big, occasional meals. The **10 rules of feeding horses** are not complicated, but they are easy to overlook when stable routines are packed.

Initially, keep **feeding frequency** consistent. Smaller, frequent meals are better than large servings that leave extended gaps. Next, make sure **fresh water** is constantly available. Water intake supports healthy digestion, feed

passage, and normal hydration, especially when the horse is on dry forage.

Then, avoid making drastic changes to the ration. The horse's gut microbes need time to adjust, so any new feed should be introduced slowly. Sudden changes can disrupt digestive health and increase the risk of **colic**. Last, never use feed as a substitute for adequate forage.

More important rules include:

- Feed according to bodyweight, condition, and workload
- Keep forage the base of the diet
- Avoid excess starch-heavy meals
- Review the feed label before buying
- Keep feed stored properly to preserve quality
- Change the ration when the horse's work or condition changes
- Watch for signs of stress, poor appetite, or digestive change

These rules are part of sensible horse feed advice uk owners can apply every day. They are simple, but they protect the horse's gut health and make feeding more predictable. If your horse is on a strict stable routine, consistency becomes even more important.

When a complete horse feed can be a good choice

A **complete horse feed** can be useful when you want a one feed that delivers more than just calories. These feeds are often formulated with **vitamins and minerals**, fiber, protein, and energy in one ration. They are especially useful where management is simpler if the horse gets most of its nutrients from one feed bucket alongside **forage first** feeding.

That said, "complete" does not necessarily mean "best" for every horse. Some complete feeds still contain a considerable amount of **starch**, which may not suit horses with digestive sensitivity or those that are easily excited. Others are ideal for horses that need a balanced diet but do not require much additional hard feed.

Complete feeds can be a smart choice if:

- The horse is picky and needs a tasty, reliable ration
- You want to simplify feeding without juggling several products
- The forage analysis suggests nutrient gaps
- The horse needs more than hay or haylage alone can provide
- You want to improve mineral intake without adding extra volume

Even with a complete feed, the main diet should still be built around forage. The complete feed should complement the ration, not replace hay or haylage. For stalled horses, this approach helps preserve digestive health and promote a calmer daily feeding pattern.

Feed tables, tools, and useful feed planning

A **horse feeding chart** gives a helpful reference point for portion planning, but it should never be used blindly. Horses change in metabolism, temperament, appetite, and how effectively they use feed. A **horse feed calculator uk** can help work out a basic **daily ration**, but the final plan should be fine-tuned using body condition and work response.

The biggest part of portion planning is usually **hay intake**. Forage makes up the largest part of the ration for most stalled horses, and any concentrate or complete feed should be fitted around that. If the horse is not getting enough hay or haylage, no amount of bucket feed will fully make up for the lack of roughage.

When building a ration, ask these questions:

- Is the horse holding weight on current forage?
- Does the horse need extra calories, or just better nutrients?
- Is the feed too high in starch for the horse's behaviour or digestive needs?
- Is the horse getting enough long-stem roughage?
- Does the ration match the horse's workload and body condition score?

As a straightforward approach, start with forage, then add a balancer or small amount of supplementary feed if needed. Increase in small steps and monitor condition. If the horse begins to drop or add too quickly, adjust the ration rather than waiting for the problem to become obvious.

How much horse feed costs plus what affects the price

Horse feed cost differs significantly, and price alone does not tell you whether a feed offers solid value. The key is **feed value**: which nutrients you get for the money, how much you need to feed each day, and whether the product suits the horse's needs without waste.

forage based fibre feed

Several factors affect cost. Different **horse feed companies** use different ingredient profiles, quality standards, and formulation methods. **Bag size** also matters, because larger bags may have a reduced price per kilo even if the upfront price is higher. A more concentrated feed may seem expensive but can be a smarter buy if you need to feed less of it.

When comparing products, consider:

- Unit cost, not just bag price
- How long the bag lasts at the recommended ration
- Whether the feed replaces other supplements
- How much forage remains the main calorie source
- Whether the feed is appropriate for the horse's current condition

A feed with better feed value may cost more upfront but save money overall if it delivers the right nutrition with less waste. For stalled horses, the most cost-effective option is often a forage-led ration with targeted supplementation rather than an overcomplicated bucket feed plan.

Choosing a feed brand and assessing products

There are a lot of **horse feed companies** on the market, and the best way to compare them is by looking closely at the **ingredient list** and **nutritional analysis**. Do not rely on branding alone. The feed label tells you far more about whether a product suits a stalled horse.

For example, **spillers horse feed** is one of the best-known names, but the right product still depends on the individual horse. A brand may offer different feeds for condition, performance, fibre support, or balancer use. The question is not which brand is best in general, but which formula best fits the horse's needs.

When comparing products, check:

- The first ingredients on the list
- How much fibre it contains and digestibility
- Starch level and sugar content
- Protein quality and amount
- Vitamin and mineral content
- Feeding rate and daily cost

This is where a careful read of the feed label matters. A feed that looks suitable on the front of the bag may not be the best choice if the starch level is more elevated than ideal or if the ration would still need extra supplements to be balanced.

Common feeding mistakes with stalled horses

Some of the most frequent problems with stalled horses come from feeding mistakes rather than from the horse itself. The biggest risk is **overfeeding**, especially when a horse is stabled for long periods and is not using as much energy as the feed provides. Overfeeding can lead to excess weight, restless behaviour, and digestive stress.

Another major issue is feeding too much starch too quickly. High-starch meals may increase the risk of gut upset and can contribute to **colic**. Horses with sensitive digestion or poor tolerance for richer diets may also develop discomfort or behavioural changes.

Other common mistakes include:

- **Sudden diet change** without gradual transition
- Failing to offer enough forage
- Choosing concentrates when the horse only needs better fibre
- Ignoring changes in body condition
- Failing to supply enough water
- Feeding by habit rather than by current need

Ulcers can also be a concern in stalled horses, especially if there are long gaps without forage, stress in the stable, or a diet that is too concentrated. A softer fibre-based ration and regular routine are important parts of prevention. If the horse shows signs of discomfort, reduced appetite, or a poor coat and condition, reassess the feeding plan quickly.

Advice on horse feed for new owners

If you are unfamiliar to stable management, start with straightforward **horse feed for beginners** advice: feed forage first, keep the schedule consistent, and make changes slowly. You do not need an elaborate feeding plan to do well. Many stalled horses do well on a **forage-based diet** with a well-selected balancer or a modest amount of supplementary feed.

Vet advice is important if the horse has weight loss, poor appetite, repeated digestive upset, lameness that affects workload, or a medical condition that changes nutritional needs. If the horse is senior, underweight, or prone to **colic**, professional input becomes even more valuable. An **equine nutritionist** can also help when you want to adjust the ration to condition, age, and performance.

Beginner-friendly feeding should include **condition monitoring** on a regular basis. Look at body shape, topline, rib coverage, energy levels, and droppings. Small changes tell you whether the ration is doing its job. A good plan is usually straightforward to understand: enough hay or haylage, clean water, a feed that meets the horse's needs, and gradual adjustments as needed.

If you are unsure how to choose, prioritise these priorities:

- Forage quality and availability
- Overall weight and body condition score
- How much work the horse is doing
- The starch content and sugar content
- Whether the horse needs extra vitamins and minerals

FAQ: answers to stalled horse feeding questions

What is the best horse feed for a horse kept in a stall?

The best horse feed for a stalled horse is usually a forage-based ration based on hay or haylage, with a high-fibre bucket feed only if extra nutrients or calories are needed. Look for highly digestible fibre, controlled starch, and a balanced mineral profile. The exact best feed choice depends on workload, age, and body condition score.

Do stalled horses need complete horse feed, or is hay enough?

Some stalled horses do well on just hay or haylage if the forage is good enough and the horse maintains condition. Others need a complete horse feed to provide missing vitamins and minerals or extra calories. The decision should be based on the horse's workload, body condition, and overall ration rather than on convenience alone.

How much horse feed should I feed per day?

There is no single answer because the ideal daily ration varies with bodyweight, workload, forage quality, and the horse's current condition. Refer to a horse feeding chart or a horse feed calculator uk as a starting point, then adjust based on condition monitoring. For most stalled horses, forage remains the main part of the ration.

What are the core horse feeding rules to follow?

The key horse feeding rules include keeping a steady feeding schedule, providing fresh water at all times, increasing feed gradually, prioritising forage, and avoiding sudden diet change. These are part of the 10 rules of feeding horses that help maintain digestive health and minimise the risk of colic.

How do I choose horse feed for beginners?

If you are choosing horse feed for beginners, start with a forage-based diet and select a basic feed that matches the horse's workload and body condition. Examine the ingredient list and nutritional analysis, and ask for horse feed advice uk from a vet or equine nutritionist if you are unsure. The best feed choice is the one that supports health without overcomplicating the ration.