

How is a poor doer horse?

A **poor doer** is a horse which finds it hard to hold healthy weight and condition even when it looks like it is eating enough. The main problem is often a mismatch between **calorie intake** and the horse's needs, which can be affected by workload, age, temperament, health, and its naturally higher **metabolic rate**. Some poor doers burn fuel quickly, while others may have a lower appetite, weaker digestion, or trouble using feed efficiently.

A simple way to assess condition is by using a **body condition score** alongside regular weight checks and a close look at **rib coverage**, topline, and overall **muscle tone**. A horse that is dropping weight, looks tucked up, or has poor cover over the ribs and rump may need a different feeding approach. Ongoing **weight loss** should never be ignored, because it can signal that the feeding plan, turnout, workload, or health status needs to change.

Not every lean horse is a poor doer. Some are simply in **maintenance**, while others need more concentrated nutrition to support **condition** and **weight gain**. Before changing any **horse feed**, it helps to understand whether the problem is not enough forage, too little energy, poor **digestive health**, or a medical issue.

What should you feed a poor doer horse?

The most suitable **horse feed** for a poor doer is usually one that supports a **forage-first** routine, is easy to eat, and delivers enough usable energy without overloading the gut with starch. In practical terms, that often means mixing [UK grain free equine feed](#) quality **forage** with a suitable **complete horse feed**, a **high fibre feed**, or a mix of both depending on the horse's needs.

There are many **types of horse feed**, but poor doers usually do best with energy that is more **digestible fibre** and oil-based rather than heavy on cereal. This helps provide **slow release energy** and supports **gut health** and steady intake. A feed with moderate **sugar content** and controlled **starch** is often more suitable than a very rich mix that may upset digestion.

A sensible approach often includes:

- Generous amounts of **forage** from **hay** or **haylage**
- A tasty **complete horse feed** or balancer-based ration
- A fibre-rich bucket feed with **chaff** for extra chew time and slow eating
- Extra energy where needed, usually from a controlled, energy-dense source

For many poor doers, the goal is not just more food, but better absorbed food. A well-chosen feed should support **calorie intake** without harming **digestive health**. If the horse is already getting enough forage, the next step is often a more targeted concentrate rather than simply increasing volume.

Which horse feed is the best choice for hard keepers?

There is not one best solution for each horse, but the most useful options tend to come from well-known **horse feed companies** that provide feed designed for weight gain, fitness, and appetite support. Products from brands such as **Spillers horse feed** are often considered because they include options for poor doers, good-doers, and horses needing condition support. The label matters more than the brand name, though: always check the **feed label** for energy, fibre, starch, and sugar levels.

For many poor doers, the best practical choice is a feed that includes:

- **Condition cubes** for additional energy and condition support
- **Chaff** to increase chew time, palatability, and fibre content
- A **complete horse feed** if you want a one-step all-in-one ration
- A **feed balancer** if forage is good but the diet needs nutritional topping up

Condition cubes are practical when you need more energy in a smaller volume. They can suit horses that struggle to eat large meals, provided the total ration is managed carefully. **Chaff** helps bulk out the bucket feed, encourages chewing, and can make a ration more appealing. A good high-fibre chaff can also support **digestive health**.

When choosing between products, think about the horse's workload, temperament, and appetite. A nervous horse may benefit from a fibre-led feed with lower starch and reliable **slow release energy**. A horse in harder work may need a more **energy-dense** formula, but the ration should still protect the gut and avoid sudden spikes in blood sugar.

How much horse feed should a poor doer get?

Feeding amounts should be guided by the horse's **bodyweight**, current **body condition score**, exercise level, and the quantity and standard of forage already being eaten. A **horse feeding chart** is a useful starting point because it offers a rough guide for daily amounts, but it should not replace observation or professional advice. A **horse feed calculator UK** can also help estimate a starting ration, especially when paired with a weight tape and a condition assessment.

As a rule, increase feed gradually and track whether the horse is improving in condition. For poor doers, **bucket feed** is often best used to supplement forage rather than replace it. Small, measured meals are less risky and more suitable than large buckets once or twice a day. Feed rate matters because the gut can only handle so much at once.

General **horse feeding rules** suggest that forage should remain the base of the ration. Concentrates should support the diet, not dominate it. If the horse is getting plenty of hay or haylage but is still losing condition, then the bucket feed may need to become more energy-dense, more frequent, or better balanced.

Key points to keep in mind:

- Use a **horse feeding chart** as a guide, then adjust to condition
- Check whether the horse is actually eating all forage offered
- Split **bucket feed** into smaller meals if possible
- Raise calories gradually to support safe **weight gain**
- Review the ration after any workload or turnout change

10 rules of feeding horses with bad condition

Those **10 rules of feeding horses** are a practical starting point for horses in bad condition. They are founded on common **horse feeding rules** and meant to support steady improvement without disrupting the digestive system.

- 1. Place **forage** as the priority and make sure the horse has sufficient to eat throughout the day.
- 2. Select good-quality **hay** or **haylage**, chosen for palatability and consistency.
- 3. Offer small amounts frequently rather than relying on large meals.

- 4. Offer **small frequent meals** to support the hindgut and improve uptake.
- 5. Pick feeds that are fibre-led and suitable for **digestive health**.
- 6. Prevent dramatic changes in ration or **sudden change** in any feed component.
- 7. Assess the horse's teeth, worm control, and general health if weight is not improving.
- 8. Match the ration to workload so the horse gets enough support for condition and exercise.
- 9. Rely on condition scoring, not guesswork, to judge progress.
- 10. Reassess the ration regularly and change it little by little.

The idea is to support the horse with a steady intake of digestible calories, not to overwhelm the system. **Forage** should remain the base, and any added feed should improve nutrient balance without creating avoidable digestive stress.

How to choose a feed plan: forage, supplement, or blend?

The right feeding plan depends on whether your horse needs more calories, a stronger vitamin and mineral supply, or both. A smart place to start is with **forage analysis**, especially if the horse is eating a lot of hay or haylage but still not maintaining condition. Knowing the actual nutrient profile of your forage helps you decide whether to add a **feed balancer**, a concentrate, or a tailored **horse feed mix recipe**.

A forage-plus-balancer plan is often well suited when forage intake is solid but the overall nutrient balance is lacking. A balancer can top up deficiencies in vitamins, minerals, and amino acids without adding much extra bulk. This can be helpful for a horse that needs better **condition** and **muscle tone** but does not need much more feed volume.

A hard feed plan may suit horses that need more energy. In that case, a **hard feed** can add calories, especially when combined with chaff and forage. Some owners choose a simple blend using a **horse feed mix recipe** based on a fibre cube, chaff, and balancer. This can be a adaptable way to fine-tune calorie intake while keeping the ration easy to use.

Pick the plan that best fits the horse's appetite, body condition, and workload:

- **Forage plus balancer**: ideal for horses needing nutritional balance more than extra bulk
- **Forage plus hard feed**: best for poor doers needing more energy and improved condition
- **Mixed bucket feed**: most useful when appetite is variable and you need to improve palatability

Whichever route you go with, keep the diet steady enough to support gut function and avoid unnecessary **sudden change**.

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How much does horse feed cost?

Horse feed cost differs greatly depending on the feed type, the quantity required, and whether you are using a feed balancer, cubes, chaff, or a premium complete ration. The real question is not just the cost per bag, but the **cost per day**. A more expensive feed may actually be more economical if the horse needs a smaller amount of it to maintain condition.

When planning a **feeding budget**, consider the full ration, not only the concentrate. Hay and forage, bedding, supplements, and regular health care all affect total feeding costs. If a horse is a genuine poor doer, spending more on a quality ration can be worthwhile if it improves **weight gain** and reduces waste.

Horse feed companies offer products at different price points. Some premium feeds, including those from **Spillers horse feed**, are formulated for specific needs and may cost more upfront. However, if they help the horse maintain better condition with less product, the daily cost may be acceptable. A good way to compare options is to calculate the daily feeding rate alongside the bag price and make sure the ration matches the horse's needs.

Horse feed for novices: frequent errors to watch out for

If you are new to **horse feed for beginners**, the biggest mistake is often assuming that larger amounts always means better condition. This can cause **overfeeding** without fixing the underlying issue. Poor doers need thoughtful ration planning, not just more feed at once.

Another common error is failing to consider **digestive health**. A horse that suddenly gets richer feed may eat less comfortably, show reduced appetite, or develop loose droppings. Feeding should be introduced gradually, because a **sudden dietary change** can disturb the hindgut and weaken the benefits of the new ration.

Beginners also sometimes neglect forage quality. If the horse is getting plenty of feed but poor-quality roughage, the diet may still be insufficient. Others choose a concentrate that is too high in starch for the horse's disposition or exercise level, which can create spikes and dips in energy rather than steady improvement. The aim is a balanced ration that helps maintain condition while matching the horse's natural digestive design.

Can a horse feed quiz or calculator help?

Absolutely. A **what should I feed my horse quiz** or a **horse feed calculator UK** can be a useful starting point, especially if you are uncertain how to structure the ration. These tools usually look at age, weight, workload, current feed, and condition, then offer a feeding direction. They are not a substitute for an expert assessment, but they can help narrow down the options.

A good **feeding assessment** should include the horse's **body condition score**, appetite, turnout, exercise level, and any signs of discomfort or poor digestion. If a calculator gives a ration that does not align with what you can see on the horse, pay attention to the horse in front of you and reconsider the plan. The best tool is the one that helps you make a better decision, not the one that gives a fixed answer.

Rely on quizzes and calculators to guide your starting point, then monitor the horse closely for changes in appetite, droppings, energy, and condition. Modifying the ration based on real-life response is the most reliable approach.

When to seek horse feeding advice

You ought to ask for **horse feed advice UK** if your horse is losing condition, is failing to improve despite a sensible ration, or has a history of reduced appetite, illness, or digestive upset. An experienced **equine nutritionist** can assist formulate a ration that matches forage quality, workload, and body condition. This is especially useful valuable for complex cases where a simple commercial feed is not enough.

Speak to a **veterinarian** if weight loss is unexplained, rapid, or accompanied by changes in behaviour, droppings, drinking, or energy. Health issues, including **dental issues**, can make a horse appear to be a poor doer when the

real problem is pain or poor chewing ability. Even the best **horse feed** will not work properly if the horse cannot eat and digest it comfortably.

If you have already tried adjusting forage, switching concentrates, and improving feeding management without success, professional input is the next step. An expert can help interpret the horse's history, recommend the right **complete horse feed** or balancer, and suggest a more targeted plan for safe **weight gain**.

FAQ

What horse feed is best for poor doers?

The best **horse feed** for poor doers is usually a high-fibre, palatable ration that supports **weight gain** without being too high in starch. Many horses do well on a **complete horse feed**, or a mix of **condition cubes**, **chaff**, and a **feed balancer**, alongside plenty of **forage**. The best choice depends on the horse's body condition score, workload, and appetite.

Should a poor doer horse have more hard feed or more forage?

Start with more and better **forage**, because that is the foundation of the diet. If forage intake is already strong and the horse still needs help, add a suitable **hard feed** or calorie-dense bucket feed. The aim is to increase energy without compromising **digestive health**.

Is complete horse feed adequate for a thin horse?

Sometimes, yes. A good **complete horse feed** can be adequate if the horse also has adequate forage and the feeding rate is adjusted to its needs. Sometimes, the horse may need extra **condition cubes**, more chaff, or a different ration to reach enough calorie intake and support condition.

How do I know if my horse is a hard keeper?

Assess the **body condition score**, rib coverage, topline, and whether the horse is shedding **bodyweight** over time. A hard keeper often needs closer feeding to stop ongoing **weight loss**. If you are unsure, track changes in condition over several weeks rather than relying on appearance alone.

When should I ask for horse feeding advice for my horse?

Get **horse feed advice UK** if your horse keeps losing condition, refuses feed, has **dental issues**, or does not improve after a careful diet change. A **veterinarian** or **equine nutritionist** can help determine the cause and build a feeding plan that supports health, performance, and safe condition improvement.