

Choosing the right feed for **mares** is less about finding one perfect product and more about matching the **equine diet** to the horse's age, workload, body shape and reproductive stage. A mare that is carrying a foal has very different needs from an **idle mare**, while a **working mare** in regular **performance** work may need more **energy** and **muscle support** than a pasture-kept companion. The best approach is always a *forage-first* plan built around good-quality roughage, with feed selected to support **digestive health**, condition and overall **nutrition**.

From a **horse feed company uk** perspective, the most effective feeding plans are simple, practical and balanced. They prioritise **forage**, then add a **balancer**, **conditioning feed** or **low-starch feed** as needed. The goal is a **balanced ration** that supports **gut health**, helps maintain a healthy **body condition score** and supplies the right **micronutrients** and **macro nutrients** without pushing unnecessary **sugar and starch**.

What mares need from their diet

Most **mares** need a diet that supports steady condition, good **digestibility** and reliable **digestive health**. Their base diet should come from **forage**, usually **hay** or **haylage**, because this provides **fibre** and helps maintain normal gut function. A fibre-rich diet encourages chewing, saliva production and stable **metabolism**, all of which support **gut health** and reduce the risk of digestive upset.

Energy needs vary a great deal. An **idle mare** may only need enough energy to maintain a healthy weight, while a **working mare** may need more calories for workload, training and recovery. The most useful source of energy is usually fibre, with higher-calorie options added only if the mare is struggling to hold condition. This is where **nutrition** must be practical: the aim is not simply to feed more, but to feed better.

Protein is another important part of mare feeding, especially where body maintenance, foal development or milk production are involved. Quality protein supports tissues and **muscle support**, but the key is not simply the amount of crude protein on the label. What matters is the availability of the right building blocks, especially **amino acids**, which are essential for healthy body functions and a strong **balanced ration**.

Fibre is central to nearly every mare diet. It supports chewing time, digestive stability and a healthy appetite. For many mares, if the **forage quality** is good, the rest of the ration can stay quite simple. This is one reason experienced owners and a good **horse feed company uk** will often recommend starting with forage analysis before adding more feed. Understanding the base diet makes every other decision easier.

Palatability also matters. A feed that is technically well formulated but left untouched will not help. The best mare feed should be appealing enough that the horse eats it consistently, while still fitting her needs for **weight management**, condition and **forage-first** nutrition.

Best horse feed types for mares

There is no single best feed for every mare, but certain types suit common situations very well. The right choice depends on body condition, temperament, activity level and reproductive stage.

A **balancer** is often the most useful option for mares that get plenty of good **forage** but do not need many extra calories. Balancers are designed to provide concentrated **vitamins and minerals**, along with useful **amino acids** and other **micronutrients**, without adding much bulk or excessive **energy**. They suit mares on a forage-first ration where the aim is to cover nutritional gaps rather than increase weight.

A **conditioning feed** is more suitable for mares needing extra condition, harder-working horses, or those that struggle to maintain body weight. These feeds typically contain more calorie-dense ingredients and can help

improve body condition, especially when paired with adequate **forage**. For a mare that loses condition through work, winter weather or poor appetite, a conditioning feed can improve overall **condition** and support work output.

Low-starch feed is often a smart choice for mares that are sensitive, prone to digestive upset or need controlled **sugar and starch** intake. These feeds typically focus on fibre-based energy rather than high levels of cereal starch. That makes them useful for supporting **digestive health**, stable behaviour and lower risk around **laminitis** concerns. A low-starch approach can be especially helpful when the mare already gets enough forage but needs a carefully managed top-up.

Forage remains the foundation. Good-quality **hay** or **haylage** should form the bulk of the ration whenever possible. The better the forage, the easier it is to keep the rest of the diet simple. In many cases, improving forage quality or quantity does more for a mare than adding another compound feed.

For most mares, the best feed is not the richest feed. It is the feed that matches workload, condition and reproductive stage while keeping the ration balanced and forage-led.

Feeding mares by life stage

Mare feeding should always reflect life stage. A mare's needs can change significantly depending on whether she is in light work, resting, pregnant or producing milk. The terms **broodmare**, **pregnant mare**, **lactating mare** and **idle mare** all describe very different nutritional priorities.

An **idle mare** usually needs the simplest ration. Good **forage**, controlled calorie intake and a suitable **balancer** are often enough. The main aim is maintenance, not extra condition. If she is prone to putting on weight, then controlling the amount of **energy** in the bucket feed becomes important, along with careful management of **sugar and starch**.

A **working mare** often needs more energy and sometimes more protein than an idle horse, depending on the level of work. If her workload is moderate, a low-starch or conditioning feed may be enough. If she is in heavier training, she may need more strategic supplementation to maintain condition, appetite and recovery. The right feed should support work without upsetting **digestive health** or causing unwanted behaviour.

A **pregnant mare** needs a diet that supports **gestation** and the developing foal. Early on, most mares do not need a dramatic increase in feed, provided they are on good-quality forage and a balanced ration. As pregnancy progresses, the demand for **protein**, **energy** and certain nutrients rises. This is where a well-formulated balancer or broodmare feed can help.

A **lactating mare** has some of the highest nutritional demands of any equine. Milk production requires significant **energy**, **protein**, calcium, phosphorus and careful **supplementation**. During **lactation**, a mare may need much more feed than during pregnancy or idle periods, especially if she is also in **condition** loss. The ration must support both body maintenance and milk production, while still being palatable enough to encourage consistent intake.

A **broodmare** is simply a mare used for breeding, but the term often refers to a horse whose feeding plan must account for both pregnancy and lactation. Broodmares benefit from a stable, balanced ration built around excellent forage, correct minerals and enough calories to support reproductive demand. Their feeding should never be a guess; it should be based on body shape, stage of pregnancy and overall workload.

Key nutrients that matter most

Several nutrients matter especially in mare feeding, and the right balance is more important than any single ingredient. When planning a ration, think about how each nutrient contributes to the mare's body, foal development, recovery and daily comfort.

Calcium and **phosphorus** are essential structural minerals and are particularly important for pregnancy and milk production. The balance between them matters, not just the total amount. A well-designed mare feed should support the correct mineral ratio and avoid leaving gaps that could affect bone development, milk quality or overall health. This is one reason that **vitamins and minerals** in a mare ration deserve careful attention.

Amino acids are the building blocks of protein and are critical for tissue maintenance, foal development and milk synthesis. Not all protein sources are equal, so quality matters. A feed that provides the right amino acid profile can help support the mare's body more effectively than a simple high-protein feed with poor digestibility.

Vitamins and minerals underpin many everyday functions, from metabolism and immune support to reproductive health and hoof quality. A mare on forage alone may not always receive enough of the key micronutrients she needs, particularly if forage quality varies. That is why balancers and fortified feeds are often used to complete the ration.

Forage quality also affects nutrient intake. High-quality **hay** or **haylage** can provide a useful base, but forage alone may not fully meet requirements, especially for a **pregnant mare** or **lactating mare**. This is where targeted supplementation can be helpful, but only when it complements the existing diet rather than duplicating nutrients unnecessarily.

It is also important to view nutrients as part of a whole system. A mare with poor **digestive health** may not utilise the ration well, even if the feed is technically complete. Good fibre intake, suitable feeding frequency and careful selection of ingredients all contribute to better **digestibility** and a more efficient **equine diet**.

Common feeding mistakes to avoid

Even a good feed can be undermined by poor feeding management. One of the biggest mistakes is **overfeeding**. Feeding too much can create excess weight gain, wasted feed and metabolic strain, especially in an **idle mare**. Overfeeding may also increase the risk of digestive upset if the ration is too rich or introduced too quickly.

Another issue is ignoring the risk of **colic**. Sudden changes in feed, insufficient forage or over-reliance on concentrated bucket feed can all disturb the gut. Since horses are designed to process fibre continuously, large feed changes or long gaps without roughage can disrupt **gut health** and increase the chance of problems.

Laminitis is another concern, particularly for mares that are overweight or sensitive to high **sugar and starch** diets. Feeding too much cereal-based concentrate, or not managing pasture and forage intake carefully, can contribute to risk. A lower-starch, forage-led ration is often safer for mares with a tendency to gain weight or become metabolically challenged.

Owners also sometimes underestimate how much the mare's needs change across the seasons. A horse that copes well in summer on grass may lose condition when forage quality drops. In those cases, the answer is not always more energy-dense feed; it may simply be better hay, improved forage access or a more suitable balancer.

Rushing supplementation can <http://capital-news.in//story/204217/with-half-of-britains-horses-overweight-bifid-launches-grainfree-lowsugar-feed-for-the-nations-gooddoers.html> also create problems. Adding multiple products without a clear rationale may lead to nutrient overlap. A better strategy is to build the ration logically: assess forage, check condition, then add feed only where needed. That approach supports **nutrition**, avoids waste and keeps the diet easier to manage.

How to choose the right feed for your mare

The right feed starts with an honest look at the mare herself. Begin with a **body condition score**. Is she underweight, ideal or carrying too much weight? This simple assessment helps you decide whether she needs more calories, more fibre or just a better-balanced ration.

Next, look at **forage analysis**. This is one of the most useful tools in modern mare feeding because it shows the nutritional value of the **forage** you already use. Knowing the levels of fibre, protein, minerals and energy in the hay or **haylage** lets you make more precise feed choices. It reduces guesswork and supports a more accurate **balanced ration**.

Then read **feed labels** carefully. Look beyond marketing claims and check the actual nutrient profile. Pay attention to fibre content, **sugar and starch** levels, protein quality and the amounts of **vitamins and minerals**. If the feed is designed for mares, broodmares or breeding stock, it should clearly explain how it supports those requirements.

Vet advice is essential if the mare is pregnant, lactating, underweight, ill, recovering or showing signs of metabolic difficulty. A vet can help you adapt the ration if there are concerns about **colic**, **laminitis**, fertility or digestive upset. Professional guidance is especially valuable when a mare has changing needs or when you are trying to choose between a balancer, conditioning feed or low-starch option.

In many cases, the best choice is a simple one: good **forage**, a suitable **balancer** and a carefully chosen top-up if needed. If the mare needs more condition, use a **conditioning feed**. If she needs calmer, fibre-led nutrition with controlled starch, use a **low-starch feed**. The key is matching the feed to the mare, not forcing the mare to fit the feed.

FAQs about feeding mares

What is the best horse feed for mares?

The best feed depends on the mare's body condition, workload and reproductive stage. In many cases, a forage-first diet with a **balancer** is enough for an **idle mare**, while a **working mare** or **broodmare** may need a **conditioning feed** or specialised low-starch option. The best choice is the one that supports **nutrition, digestive health** and the mare's individual needs.

Should pregnant mares eat differently?

Yes. A **pregnant mare** needs a ration that supports **gestation** and foal development, with particular attention to **protein, calcium, phosphorus** and **vitamins and minerals**. Early pregnancy may not require major changes, but later stages often do. A balanced forage-led ration is usually the best starting point.

Do lactating mares need more calories?

Yes. A **lactating mare** needs more **energy**, protein and minerals because milk production is demanding. **Lactation** can increase feed requirements significantly, so the ration must support body condition as well as milk

output. High-quality **forage** and a suitable broodmare feed or balancer often work well together.

Is a balancer enough for an idle mare?

Often, yes. For an **idle mare** that holds weight well, a **balancer** plus good **forage** may be enough to meet nutritional needs without excess calories. This is especially useful for **weight management** and controlling **sugar and starch** intake. If the mare loses condition, you may need to add more feed.

What ingredients should I avoid in mare feed?

Avoid feeds that are too high in **sugar and starch** if the mare is prone to **laminitis**, weight gain or digestive sensitivity. Be cautious with overly rich rations that encourage **overfeeding**, and avoid abrupt changes that can contribute to **colic**. Always check labels, assess **forage quality** and seek **vet advice** if the mare has special needs.