

What horse feed is and why vitamins and minerals matter

Horse feed is any prepared feed used in addition to, or occasionally instead of, forage to support meeting a horse's daily nutrient requirements. The aim is not simply to add calories. A well-chosen horse feed supports nutritional balance by supplying vitamins, minerals, protein, and digestible energy in balanced amounts for the horse's bodyweight, workload, and condition score.

For most horses, forage should form the foundation of the diet because the digestive system is designed for a forage-first approach. Grass, hay, and haylage help maintain gut health, provide fibre, and encourage steady digestion. However, forage alone does not always supply enough vitamins and minerals, especially when pasture quality is variable or when a horse has higher energy needs. That is where horse feed, balancers, concentrates, or a complete horse feed may be useful.

Vitamins and minerals are small parts of the ration, but they have a big impact. Vitamins such as vitamin A, vitamin D, and vitamin E support vision, bones, immune function, muscle function, and recovery. Minerals like calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, sodium, potassium, selenium, copper, and zinc help with bone strength, nerve function, hydration, metabolism, and hoof and coat condition. Trace minerals are particularly important because even small deficiencies can affect performance, fertility, and long-term health.

A common mistake is assuming that more horse feed automatically means better nutrition. In reality, the right feed is the one that closes gaps without creating overfeeding, excess starch, or unnecessary calories. That is why practical feeding decisions should start with forage, then build a balanced ration around the horse's actual needs.

Kinds of horse feed and what each one provides

There are several types of horse feed, and each fulfills a different purpose. Choosing between them depends on whether your horse needs energy, extra vitamins and minerals, improved fibre intake, or all three.

Forage is the foundation of the diet. It contains hay, haylage, and grass. Forage delivers fibre, encourages chewing time, and helps stabilise the digestive system. It is usually lower in starch and sugar relative to many hard feeds, which makes it suitable for a forage-first feeding plan.

Concentrates are more calorie-dense feeds, often made from grains, fiber mixes, oil, and added vitamins and minerals. They are used when a horse needs additional energy than forage alone can provide. Because concentrates can be richer, they must be fed with care to avoid digestive problems and excess energy intake.

Complete horse feed is formulated to be given as the sole hard feed alongside forage. It usually combines calories, bulk, nutrients, vitamins, and minerals in one ration, which can make easier feeding. Some complete feeds are especially useful for horses that struggle with large feed volumes or for owners who want ease.

Other common varieties of horse feed include balancers, feed cubes, pelleted feeds, chaff, and conditioning rations. A nutritional balancer is a compact concentrated product that helps support vitamin and mineral consumption without supplying much extra energy. That can be a good option for a good doer or a horse on plenty of forage. Conditioning feeds are usually more high-energy and may benefit horses with increased energy needs or those needing additional body condition.

The right option often depends less on the brand name and more on the function the feed has in the ration. If the diet is poor in forage quality, the feed should assist bridge nutrient gaps. If the horse already has enough calories, the feed should mainly maintain micronutrient intake rather than lead to unnecessary weight gain.

How to select horse feed for first-time owners

If you are new to horse feed for beginners, the smartest starting point is not the feed label alone. First by assessing the horse's body condition score, current workload, forage access, and digestive health. These factors tell you whether the horse needs more energy, better nutrient coverage, or simply a more consistent feeding schedule.

A horse with a healthy condition score and steady forage intake may do well on a balancer plus forage. A horse that is underweight, in regular work, or recovering from illness may need more concentrated energy and protein. A good doer, by contrast, may need a low-calorie option that still delivers vitamins and minerals without excess energy.

Horse feeding rules matter here. Select feed based on need, not habit. If the horse is holding weight well, adding large amounts of hard feed can be counterproductive. If digestive health is a concern, avoid sudden changes and introduce any new feed gradually. Horses benefit from consistency, and their digestive system tends to react badly to abrupt changes in daily intake.

Beginners should also look for clear labelling. Check the ingredient list, digestibility, and nutrient specification. The feed should state what vitamins and minerals it supplies and whether it is a fortified feed. If you are unsure, compare several products and decide whether you need a balancer, a complete horse feed, or simply better forage.

Horse feeding rules: the ten basics to follow

The 10 horse feeding rules are practical habits that support health, prevent deficiencies, and lower the chance of overfeeding. They are especially useful when building a balanced ration.

- **1. Put forage first.** Whenever possible, use a forage-first approach.
- **2. Match feed to workload.** Energy needs shift with exercise, growth, pregnancy, and age.
- **3. Provide small meals.** Small meals are easier on the digestive system than large, infrequent portions.
- **4. Provide constant water intake.** Clean water supports digestion, hydration, and nutrient utilisation.
- **5. Make changes gradually.** Sudden shifts can disturb gut health.
- **6. Do not overfeed.** Too many calories can result in weight gain and metabolic issues.
- **7. Do not focus on calories alone.** Calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, sodium, and potassium all matter.
- **8. Do not depend on one feed for everything.** Some horses need forage plus a balancer or supplement.
- **9. Check body condition score regularly.** This helps you notice changes before they become problems.
- **10. Maintain a consistent feeding schedule.** Regular timing supports digestion and behaviour.

These horse feeding rules offer a useful framework whether the horse is a leisure pony, a good doer, or a performance horse. They also help owners make improved decisions about supplements, concentrates, and fibre-based feeds.

Using a horse feeding chart to plan a daily ration

A horse feeding chart is a useful reference that helps turn forage intake, workload, and weight into a daily ration. It is not a substitute for professional guidance, but it offers owners a clear way to evaluate daily intake.

Start with the horse's bodyweight and condition score. Then estimate forage intake and compare that with the horse's workload. A horse in light work may need only forage plus a balancer, while a horse in harder work may

need extra concentrates or a complete horse feed. The chart should also account for age, appetite, and whether the horse has special nutritional requirements.

When using a horse feeding chart, focus on the following points:

- How much forage the horse eats each day
- Whether the horse is maintaining, losing, or gaining weight
- The level of workload and energy use
- Any signs of poor coat, weak hooves, or low stamina
- Whether the current ration is supporting gut health and digestion

A chart is especially useful for spotting imbalances. For example, a horse may be getting enough calories but still have a deficiency in trace minerals. Another horse may be overfed in terms of energy but underfed in key micronutrients. A practical ration plan should resolve both problems together.

How much horse feed should you provide?

There is no single answer to how much horse feed should you provide, which is why a lot of owners use a horse feed calculator uk tool as a reference. The correct ration size depends on body weight, forage quality, workload, and whether the horse needs energy, protein, or mainly micronutrient support.

A useful starting point is to look at the horse's daily energy requirements and compare them to what forage already provides. If forage meets most needs, the horse feed portion can stay small. If not, ration size may need to increase. This becomes especially important for a performance horse with higher energy demands, or for a horse that struggles to maintain weight.

Body weight matters because ration size should be proportional. A heavier horse usually needs more total feed than a lighter one, but not necessarily more concentrate if the forage quality is already good. Owners should also watch for overfeeding, especially in good doers, because excess calories can quickly lead to poor condition management.

Some people estimate using the horse feed calculator uk approach by entering bodyweight, activity level, and goal condition. That can help determine whether the diet needs more fibre, more energy, or a better balance of vitamins and minerals. The best ration is one that supports health without feeding more than necessary.

How far does horse feed cost?

Horse feed cost is influenced by the variety of feed, the bag size, the nutrient density, and how much of it the horse really needs each day. A bag that seems expensive may end up being good value if the daily feeding cost is low because the feed is concentrated and only a small amount is required.

When asking how much does horse feed cost, look at the whole picture rather than the shelf price. A larger bag size may reduce the cost per kilo, but if the horse only needs a small amount, a smaller bag may still be the better choice. Equally, a cheaper feed may require a larger daily amount, which can increase the real daily feeding cost.

To compare horse feed cost fairly, consider:

- Cost per bag size
- How long the bag lasts at the recommended rate
- Whether the feed replaces the need for a separate balancer or supplement

- The quality of the ingredient list and nutrient specification

Owners should also factor in forage, balancers, and any supplement costs. Sometimes a more expensive fortified feed is actually more cost-effective if it reduces the number of separate products needed. The goal is to feed economically while still meeting nutrient requirements.

Bifid UK

+44 800 422 0888

sales@bifid.co.uk

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

Top horse feed companies and what to look at

There are many horse feed companies on the market, and the best choice is not always the one with the most eye-catching packaging. Evaluate feeds by checking the ingredient list and nutrient specification closely. These two details tell you what the feed is made from and what it provides.

Seek out clear information on source of fibre, grain content, oils, protein levels, and supplemented vitamins and minerals. A reputable feed may also specify whether it is designed for leisure horses, conditioning, competition use, or lower-energy feeding. The most helpful products are open about how well it is digested and recommended feeding rates.

Spillers horse feed remains a well-known option commonly mentioned by equestrian owners looking ***fibre rich feed for horses*** for an enriched ration. It can be useful to compare products from different horse feed companies in the same category rather than thinking all feeds meet the same need. A balancer should be compared with other balancers; a complete horse feed should be compared with comparable complete feeds.

The most important questions are simple: Does the feed suit the horse's workload? Does it deliver the correct vitamins and minerals? Does it fit the horse's digestive health needs? Does the daily ration suit the horse's bodyweight and condition score? Those answers matter more than brand familiarity alone.

Horse feed advice for balancing vitamins and minerals

Helpful horse feed guidance uk usually opens with the idea that vitamins and mineral levels should be balanced according to actual need, not guessed. A roughage analysis can support, but even without one, owners can still make wise decisions by considering the diet as a whole.

Vitamin E is especially important for muscle performance and antioxidant support, while selenium acts closely with it in numerous metabolic functions. Copper and zinc play a role for connective tissue, hoof quality, skin, and overall development. Calcium and phosphorus must also be kept in careful balance because they serve a major role in bone health. Magnesium supports nerve and muscle performance, while sodium and potassium help maintain fluid balance and hydration.

Many horses get enough calories but still lack micronutrient coverage. That is where a balancer or fortified feed can help. In some cases, a vitamin supplement may be useful, but it should be chosen carefully so it does not duplicate what the feed already provides. Too much supplementation can be just as unhelpful as a deficiency.

These are some practical signs that the ration may need checking:

- Topline loss or poor recovery
- A lackluster coat or weak hooves

- Unexpected weight loss or gain
- Reduced appetite or changes in digestion
- Reduced performance in a horse that is otherwise fit

The best horse feed advice uk is often to make the ration straightforward, targeted, and based on the horse's real nutrient requirements.

Can you make a horse feed mix recipe at home?

A horse feed mix recipe can be made at home, but it should be handled carefully. Mixing bran, oats, and other ingredients without a clear plan can create an imbalanced ration. Home mixes may be useful for some horses, but they are rarely the easiest way to achieve full nutritional balance.

If you want to build your own horse feed mix recipe, a balancer is usually the best starting point because it helps cover vitamins and minerals. Bran and oats can then be used in small amounts if the horse needs extra energy. Even so, the ration still needs to be checked for total protein, fibre, starch, and micronutrient coverage.

Oats are traditional and can be useful for horses needing quick energy, but they are not ideal for every horse. Bran is often included in home mixes, yet it should not be relied upon as a complete source of nutrients. Both ingredients should be used with caution and only as part of a wider balanced plan.

Home mixing may suit experienced owners who understand nutrient requirements and can calculate daily [overweight horse feed](#) intake properly. For many beginners, though, a well-formulated balancer or complete horse feed is a safer and simpler choice. It reduces the risk of deficiency and makes feeding schedule management much easier.

Complete horse feed: when it helps and when it does not

Complete horse feed can be very helpful when practicality, uniformity, and nutrient density are priorities. It combines many of the elements needed for a balanced diet, often reducing the need for extra feeds. For some horses, this is a simple way to meet daily needs while keeping feeding simple.

It works best when the horse still receives adequate roughage. Roughage remains vital for gut health and normal chewing behaviour. A complete horse feed should work alongside forage, not replace it entirely. If the horse already eats good forage, a complete feed can help fill in the gaps without large meal volumes.

Complete horse feed is often useful for a performance horse that needs reliable nutrient density. It may also suit horses that have difficulty with bulky rations, picky eaters, or owners who want a simple, all-in-one approach. On the other hand, it may not be ideal for a good doer that needs very little extra energy, because even complete feeds can provide additional energy than necessary.

The key question is whether the horse truly needs nutrient density or just a small micronutrient top-up. If the latter, a balancer may be the smarter option. If the horse needs more energy and a more complete package, a complete horse feed may be the best fit.

FAQs about horse feed, nutrition, and supplements

What horse feed is best for vitamins and minerals?

The best horse feed for vitamins and minerals is usually one that matches the horse's workload and bodyweight without adding unneeded calories. For many horses, that means a balancer or fortified feed alongside forage. If the horse needs more energy as well, a complete horse feed may be more suitable. The best choice depends on whether the diet needs a micronutrient top-up, extra calories, or both.

Do horses need supplements if they eat complete horse feed?

Not always. A complete horse feed is designed to provide a broad spread of nutrients, so some horses will not need extra supplements. However, the decision depends on the rest of the ration, especially forage quality and daily intake. If the horse already receives enough vitamins and minerals from feed and forage, extra supplements may be redundant. Always check the label before adding anything new.

How do I read a horse feeding chart effectively?

Follow a horse feeding chart by first identifying bodyweight, roughage intake, workload, and body condition score. Then match that information with the horse's present diet and adjust gradually if needed. A chart works most effectively when it helps you create a balanced ration rather than just boosting feed amounts. It should support meal timing choices, daily intake planning, and any changes in exercise or weight.

How much does horse feed cost per day?

The daily feeding cost depends on the feed type, how much the horse needs, and whether you also use a balancer or supplement. A more nutrient-dense feed may cost more per bag but less per day because smaller amounts are needed. To judge horse feed cost properly, compare the cost per serving, not only the bag price. That gives a better picture of actual daily feeding expense.

What are the main horse feeding rules to follow?

The main horse feeding rules are to focus on forage-first, feed small meals, provide constant water intake, and match the ration to the horse's condition score and workload. It is also important to avoid overfeeding, make any changes gradually, and monitor digestive health. These basic horse feeding rules help maintain a balanced diet and lower the risk of deficiency or digestive upset.

How does horse feed support a balanced vitamin and mineral intake?

Horse feed supports a balanced diet by supplying vitamins, trace minerals, and other nutrients that forage alone may not provide in sufficient amounts. A well-formulated feed can help cover trace minerals such as copper, zinc, and selenium, while also contributing vitamin A, vitamin D, and vitamin E. This is especially useful when the forage supply is inconsistent or when the horse has higher nutrient requirements.

What is the difference between a balancer and a complete feed?

A balancer is usually a small, nutrient-dense feed that supplies vitamins, minerals, and often protein without many calories. A complete horse feed is designed to provide a broader nutritional package and usually contributes more energy as well. In simple terms, a balancer is for nutrient coverage with low energy, while a complete feed offers more nutrient density and can support horses with higher energy needs.

Is spillers horse feed a good illustration of a supplemented ration?

Spillers horse feed is frequently seen as an instance of a supplemented feed because many of its products are designed to include vitamins and minerals alongside energy and fibre. If it is suitable depends on the specific

product and the horse's needs. In the case of any fortified feed, review the nutrient specification, ingredient list, and feeding rate to make sure it matches the horse's ration and does not repeat other supplements.