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# Catering for Horses Today

## Grass related health issues– top 10 tips

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1. Equids in general Manage pastures for leafy growth, through maintaining moderate soil fertility and keeping the sward short by topping or grazing with sheep
2. Keep horses in trim not fat condition. Assess weight and condition score regularly, if weight changes, adjust grazing/feed accordingly
3. Equids pre-disposed to laminitis Restrict grass intakes especially in spring and autumn– strip graze, use a muzzle or restrict pasture access, to one or two hours in the morning, in shaded areas if possible, for lower NSC content. If very susceptible, zero graze at times of high risk. During periods of restricted or zero grazing ensure the balance of the diet is fibre-based (at least 1% of body weight DM per day). Do not feed cereal-based or molassed feeds. Low NSC hay, un-molassed chaffs, un-molassed sugar beet pulp, a little alfalfa, and a vitamin and mineral feed balancer are suitable. Re-introduce to grass very gradually
4. Get all hay, and grass based- feeds, tested for NSC content. Rapidly dried hay cut in the afternoon on a cloudless sunny day can contain upwards of 25% NSC. If feeding an animal prone to laminitis, the hay can be soaked overnight in clean water, to leach out at least some of the NSC
5. If your horse displays Insulin Resistant (IR) characteristics (cresty neck and unusual, lumpy fat deposits) act now. He doesn't have to be fat to be IR. Even if he hasn't had laminitis it is better to assume he is susceptible and manage accordingly.
6. Daily exercise is important-this increases insulin sensitivity. Don't let your horse become a 'couch potato'.
7. Consider grazing laminitis-susceptible equines in particular, and 'good doers' on pastures which contain species that generally produce lower levels of fructan than most ryegrass species e.g. timothy, red fescue etc. If you have access to poor quality heath or moorland, graze that.
8. Equine grass sickness (*Equine dysautonomia*) – avoid grazing where soil has been disturbed, (mole hills, mechanical manure collectors, recent cultivation) remove horses from pasture after a period of cool, dry conditions for more than one week. Keep horses off pastures during spring, particularly those which have a history of equines contracting the illness. Such fields should be grazed by other stock in spring and autumn.
9. Summer heaves - (summer-pasture associated obstructive pulmonary disorder: SPAOD) Management involves: environmental control and veterinary treatment. Remove from

offending pasture, keep in as dust-free environment as possible, (bed on rubber mats, wash daily), feed haylage, and any concentrates should be pelleted or molassed. Veterinary treatment also required in many cases. Where the above management fails to resolve SPAOD, remove horses to a different location in summer months.

10. Check pastures regularly for poisonous plants in pastures either growing or that could have blown in or been dumped.

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