

FEEDING DONKEYS WITH LAMINITIS

Essential advice to help your donkey maintain a healthy weight.

 7 May 2016  [Read on The Donkey Sanctuary website](#)

Managing donkeys with laminitis is a long-term issue focused around maintaining a healthy weight and feeding appropriately to prevent recurrence/exacerbation of the condition. Laminitis is a complex health issue and successful management of such a painful, serious and long-term condition is dependent upon many factors.

Donkeys with laminitis need specialist feeding, which often requires major changes to feeding and other aspects of daily care.

Do not attempt to manage a **laminitic donkey** alone. Working with a knowledgeable vet and farrier is of utmost importance.

THINGS YOU **SHOULD DO**

- ✓ Feed forages with a low starch and sugar content, preferably under 10% sugar and starch
- ✓ Have 'farm produced' forage tested to check the energy and sugar content
- ✓ Commercially produced high fibre 'laminitic safe' haylage can be a good option
- ✓ Very low energy short chop products may be useful

- ✓ Check feed and bedding straw for retained grain
- ✓ Feed little and often to ensure donkeys are trickle feeding as they would in the wild
- ✓ Encourage ad-lib feeding – straw is particularly useful for those with good teeth and should be freely available
- ✓ A non-pasture run out area such as a dirt paddock, sand school or bark chipped area will allow the donkey precious exercise time without access to grazing once veterinary advice allows periods of exercise
- ✓ Use an appropriate feed balancer to supplement vitamins/minerals if feeding a straw only diet
- ✓ Feed an underweight laminitic donkey very carefully, aiming for high fibre, low sugar products as donkeys will gain weight easily on fibre-based products.

THINGS YOU **SHOULD AVOID**

- ✗ Avoid all cereal-based feeds as donkeys can be maintained and encouraged to gain weight on fibre-based products without the need for inappropriate cereal feeds
- ✗ Do not allow the donkey access to grazing while suffering an acute laminitic episode
- ✗ For chronic cases always restrict grazing by area rather than time at grass as donkeys can eat the same amount in 8 hours of turnout as they can in 24 hours
- ✗ Do not starve the donkey as this may put it at risk of life threatening **hyperlipaemia**
- ✗ Do not allow the donkey to graze a frosty pasture on a sunny morning as the level of fructans in the grass may be very high at this time
- ✗ Do not feed senior or conditioning feeds even if the donkey is underweight as these feeds are too high in proteins, fats, starch and sugars
- ✓ **Monitor your donkey's weight** to avoid your donkey becoming overweight and gradually reduce weight if this is already a problem

- ✗ Remember there is no safe time to graze a laminitic donkey – fructan levels in grass can spike at any time of day or year with the right weather conditions
- ✗ Avoid feeding sugary treats
- ✓ Encourage feeding of **safe treats** such as high fibre nuts, fresh mint leaves and small quantities of fruit.



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POSSIBLE **DIETS**

- **For maintenance** – Barley or wheat straw with small quantities of HorseHage High Fibre or Timothy Haylage or low NSC hay (hay can often have high levels of sugar and this may not be lost through soaking)
- **For donkeys unable to manage any long fibre** – use short chopped fibres designed as forage replacers, fed at 2–3 kg per day to satisfy appetite (Mollichaff Donkey is ideal)
- **For weight gain** – high fibre nuts (Spillers High Fibre Nuts and Saracens Donkey Diet) or Fibre Beet (British Horse Feeds' high calorie alfalfa-based product). Feed in small amounts for very underweight animals
- **For those on straw only diets** – TopSpec Donkey Forage Balancer fed at 100 g per 100 kg bodyweight per day is an ideal supplement, providing vital vitamins and minerals. It is high in fibre but low in protein, sugar and starch as well as being low in calories so will not promote weight gain and can be used as an important part of a weight reduction programme when the rest of the diet is also calorie controlled
- **For those requiring weight loss** – TopChop Zero is a very low energy chopped straw product that can be fed ad-lib and with the addition of Donkey Forage Balancer becomes a complete feed.

MORE **INFORMATION**

Our skilled and experienced team of welfare advisers are on hand to give advice and appropriate support during office hours. For feeding and nutrition advice **contact our nutrition team** or telephone 01395 578222 and ask to be put through to the welfare department.