



FEEDING & MANAGING THE UNDERWEIGHT DONKEY

When dealing with an underweight donkey (BCS 1.5 – 2) caution should be taken to try and establish the reason behind any weight loss before making any nutritional alterations. Weight loss can occur for a number of reasons and may be related to previous neglect, age, dental problems, health issues, loss of a companion, time of year and the quality of feed sources. Before making any changes to a donkey's diet it would be beneficial to get the donkey checked over by a vet to rule out any underlying health issues. It would also be advisable to consult either an equine dental technician or vet who has gained the BEVA/BVDA qualifications and are members of the BAEDT to check for any dental problems which may be contributing to any weight loss and which may affect the types of feeds that the donkey will be able to manage. We advise that donkeys are routinely checked at least once a year by an EDT regardless of whether the donkey has any dental issues or not.



MANAGING AN UNDERWEIGHT DONKEY

- Donkeys should be body condition scored regularly and have heart girth measurements taken to monitor weight loss/gain.
- The provision of shelter is essential but rugs should also be considered during the colder months as a means of keeping the underweight donkey warm so that energy is not unnecessarily used up.
- Faecal egg count tests should be performed regularly and donkeys wormed as and when necessary according to the results.
- Underweight donkeys should not be initially overfed and any changes or increases to their diet should be done very gradually to avoid digestive upset.

FEEDING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assuming the donkey has no dental problems, ad lib straw and good quality hay or high fibre haylage (e.g. Horsehage High Fibre) should form the main part of the donkey's diet.
- If teeth are poor, a low sugar and starch hay replacement product (e.g. Mollichaff Donkey or Spillers Happy Hoof) can be fed instead.



- High fibre nuts (e.g. Saracens Donkey Diet or Spillers High Fibre Cubes) can be a good addition to the diet for encouraging weight gain and are best fed dampened or soaked.



- Speedi-Beet can be useful as an appetising top dressing to high fibre nuts, feeding no more than 250g of soaked Speedi-Beet at a time.

- For particularly underweight donkeys it may be useful to add small quantities of alfalfa to the diet as this has a higher level of protein. Alfalfa can be added to the diet in a short chop form (e.g. Mollichaff Hoofkind or Hi Fi Lite) or alternatively alfalfa pellets can be fed (e.g. Fibre Beet which must be soaked prior to feeding).



- A forage balancer such as Top Spec Comprehensive would be a good addition to the diet of an underweight donkey and will provide essential protein, vitamins and minerals that will aid weight gain.



- Once the donkey starts to gain weight and reaches a body condition score close to ideal the type of forage balancer can be changed to a lower protein product eg Top Spec Donkey Forage Balancer.
- Top Spec balancers are fed at a rate of 100g per 100kg bodyweight per day (ie 180g per day for a 180kg donkey).

If you need further advice or information please do not hesitate to contact us on 01395 578222 or by email nutrition@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk

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