



FEEDING DONKEYS

Donkeys require specialist feeding, they are not a small horse and should not be fed as such. They require fewer calories to maintain weight than a pony of the same size and enjoy trickle feeding on highly fibrous feeds similar to those found in their natural habitat. Donkeys are particularly prone to obesity and laminitis when kept in the UK and need careful dietary management to avoid problems. The following is basic feeding advice for normal, healthy animals, if you require more specialist advice eg geriatric animals please contact us for further information.

THINGS YOU SHOULD DO

- Provide the donkey with good quality feeding straw (barley and wheat are best) ad lib with small quantities of hay, haylage or grazing plus a vitamin and mineral supplement such as Top Spec Donkey Forage Balancer that does not promote weight gain.
- Check the donkey can manage to eat long fibres such as straw, haylage, and hay. Donkeys with dental issues may require long fibres to be replaced by a short chop diet instead. Donkeys should have their teeth checked at least once a year by an equine dental technician or vet who has gained the BEVA/BVDA qualifications and are members of the BAEDT.
- Condition score donkeys regularly, they are prone to weight gain which can predispose them to laminitis and hyperlipaemia.
- Feed according to body condition, restrict intake of energy rich feeds eg hay, haylage or grass if the donkey is overweight but always ensure a source of fibre (eg straw) is available to satisfy their need to trickle feed.
- Restrict grazing carefully, donkeys are very prone to laminitis, and the quantity of grazing should be controlled by restricting the size of the paddock rather than time at grazing.
- Make changes to a donkey's diet very gradually over a period of 4-6 weeks.
- Ensure all supplementary feeds are high in fibre, low in calories and suitable for laminitics.

THINGS YOU SHOULD AVOID

- Avoid all cereal grain based feeds, donkeys can be maintained and even encouraged to gain weight on fibre based products without the need for inappropriate cereal feeds.
- Don't feed sugary treats. If treats are necessary for training or handling purposes then feed no more than a handful of chopped apples, carrots, or high fibre nuts per average sized donkey per day.
- Don't feed supplements unnecessarily; donkeys only require a vitamin and mineral supplement unless other products are recommended by your vet. Supplements may in fact put donkeys off feed or they can over dose nutrients leading to problems.
- Don't provide sugar based licks, these are often marketed, as 'boredom breakers' but are not suitable for donkeys due to their high sugar content.
- Don't feed straw with retained grain, always check for this and the quality before buying large quantities.

- Don't restrict total food intake to encourage weight loss, dieting should be done carefully using low calorie products in combination with exercise. Extreme dieting can put donkeys at risk of developing hyperlipaemia.

POSSIBLE DIETS THAT CAN BE USED

An average sized (175kg) healthy, mature donkey will require 2-3kg of feed per day to satisfy their appetite. In the majority of cases this should be solely provided by straw, hay/haylage or restricted grazing plus a vitamin and mineral balancer. A guideline for donkeys with good teeth is that straw should constitute 75% of the total dietary intake during summer months and 50% in the winter with hay/haylage or restricted grazing making up the balance. Supplementary feeds suitable for donkeys with additional needs eg underweight donkeys or those with dental problems include:

- Soaked high fibre nuts e.g. Spillers High Fibre Nuts and Saracen's Donkey Diet;
- TopChop Zero, Mollichaff Donkey, Mollichaff Hoofkind and Spillers Happy Hoof;
- Speedi Beet – excellent as a 'top dressing' for soaked fibre nuts; and
- Top Spec Donkey Forage Balancer for donkeys in ideal, good or overweight condition or Top Spec Comprehensive for donkeys in poor condition or those with additional needs eg pregnant or lactating. Both balancers should be fed at a rate of 100g per 100kg bodyweight per day.



- Always introduce changes to the diet gradually and observe your donkey to ensure that it is eating. Try to avoid feeding your donkeys more than 1 kg of supplementary food at time, small frequent meals are best. Always ensure that donkeys have access to fresh clean water and an equine specific mineral lick if not being fed a vitamin and mineral supplement/balancer. Continually assess your donkey's body condition and make changes to their diet accordingly, if in doubt consult your vet or email us at nutrition@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk

We also have the following fact sheets available on request:

- Body scoring chart;
- Condition scoring and weight estimation
- Donkey weight estimator;
- Feeding & managing the overweight donkey;
- Feeding & managing the underweight donkey
- Feeding the donkey with dental problems;
- Feeding the donkey with endocrine disease;
- Feeding the donkey with respiratory problems;
- Feeding the elderly donkey;
- Feeding the laminitic donkey;
- Feeding youngsters and broodmares.

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