

What about . . . FOAL FEEDING?

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How do I feed my foal? is a frequently heard question each spring and our most frequent response is “You don’t, your mare does!” In truth, however, you do feed your foal through the dam—at least during gestation and the first few months after birth. Mares are one of the few mammalian species where the milk accurately reflects the nutritional level of the mare, so optimum nutrition all the way through is critical for a good start.

BROODMARE FEEDING

To have truly optimal nutrition, you would have begun an optimal feeding program a minimum of one year *prior* to conception. We have found that it can take upwards of two years on a non-chemical program with free-choice minerals and grass hay/graze and controlled amounts of grains and “vitamins” for a horse to become truly balanced nutritionally. We allowed that time period for any mare purchased for the broodmare band because we witnessed time after time such a difference both in the foaling-out process and in the maturity and strength of the foal with mares fed optimally as opposed to those on more popular, “feed-store” diets.

For some reason, most vets do not consider supplementing broodmares until about 3 months before the foaling date. This makes no sense to us when you consider that the fetal skeleton and brain are formed in the first 3 months of gestation and most OCD and DOD (bone development problems) begin along with skeletal development. By far the vast majority of breeders utilizing the **DYNAMITE®** program in full, have little to no experience with so-called “genetic” bone problems which leads us to believe there is far more mineral and general nutritional causation going on.

In fact the only foal we had with “bad legs” was out of a young mare we had just purchased; this is where we learned to wait before breeding! The baby was totally wind-swept (canted off to one side), all 4 legs went off in different directions, and he was buckled over in front both in his knees and pasterns—we were devastated! Luckily, he was able to stand and nurse so, in spite of the vet’s insistence that surgery was needed immediately, we closed off a smallish area in front of mom’s 12 x 16’ foaling shed so they both could still move but where he would not become tired from trying to keep up with her activity. Each week as he grew stronger, we increased the size of the small corral until it was about 24 x 30’ and he was moving pretty good as his legs seemed to straighten effortlessly. We then started to let them out of the gate into her private paddock for a while each day. The upshot of it was that by weaning time, he was totally 4-square and when he grew up, he became a barrel-racer on weekends while working cows during his week-day job. Incidentally, both mom and baby simply inhaled their Free Choice minerals, especially the **Izmine** and **1:1**.

PRE- & POST-FOALING DIETS

Our approach has been to feed all broodmares, and future broodmares, the following: free choice grass hay; free choice **DYNAMITE®** minerals (**NTM Salt**, **Izmine**, **1:1** and **2:1**); 1-1½ oz. **Dynamite Regular** pellets; 1 qt (or more if underweight) **RGR** (Pelleted Grain Ration) and weekly **DynaPro**. Bred mares are increased to 2 oz. **Dynamite Reg.** 7-8 months through gestation and into lactation. We also add daily **DynaPro** and **Easy Boy** starting about 2 wks prior to expected foaling date keeping those up through the first two to three weeks after foaling. Also after

foaling, in addition to increasing **PGR** to 2 qts twice a day, we supply **HES**, from ½ to 2 cups per feeding depending on the individual mare, which has assured abundant milk production and no weight loss for mares. After all, according to Rex Ewing’s Beyond the Hay days, “she will now start producing 20-30# of milk per day and will require 40-50% more digestible energy and 70-80% more calcium & phosphorus than she did before parturition.”

Right after birth, it is critical for foals to obtain appropriate amounts of their dam’s colostrum which is especially formulated by Nature to get that baby off to a good start. Most vets want to draw blood to check *Igg* levels to make sure mare passed on sufficient immunity to her baby, but we have found that totally unnecessary. Some **DYNAMITE®** breeders have checked and the levels are off the charts!

Most foals “scour” or have diarrhea when they are about 2 weeks old. Many breeders and vets attribute this to the mare’s hormonal imbalance during cycling but even orphans have exhibited this behavior so it probably has more to do with intestinal immaturity. We found that our babies never scoured badly and got over it very quickly with the mares on the **DYNAMITE®** program. However for those foals who do not seem to come around quickly, many individuals have successfully halted scours by syringing some **DynaPro** into the baby (10-20 cc) 2-3 x per day or every couple of hours if necessary. If that doesn’t do it, add 1 t-1T activated **Miracle Clay** to the **DynaPro**; that seems in most cases to do the trick. Every once in a while, there might be a bacterial infection involved and a few rounds of **Solace** (colloidal silver) seems to deal with that issue quite well saving antibiotics only for those times when they are absolutely necessary.

Nor do we subscribe to the common practices of deworming foals (especially with Ivermectin, a known neurological toxin!) or vaccinating them (remember those off-the-chart *Igg* levels?). Rather we believe our ideal wholesome and natural approach has enabled these foals to be so healthy, they simply need nothing more! If a deworming seems appropriate, we prefer to simply detox them with **Herbal Tonic**. Also, since a foal’s digestive system does not mature until about the age of two, we give daily **DynaPro** until then.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Well that is all well and good for normal situations, but what if there is a challenge? Overall, problems are so infrequent in **DYNAMITE®** mares and foals, that we rarely think in those terms. However a couple of instances do come to mind. One previous barrel racing mare just did not get her milk in the way all the other mares did. Her first filly was about 4 wks old when we realized we would have to step in. We made a mash of the **PGR** and ½ oz. **Dynamite Regular** plus one squirt of **DynaPro**, adding water as necessary. That filly learned to slurp it up quickly and within a few weeks’ time, had caught up in development with her siblings. It took that mare going through one more almost milkless baby before she started producing normally. With what we know now, we would have added 2 oz. **BreederPac** to mom’s feed and, now that **DynaSpark** is available, would have added that to the foal “formula.”

A second interesting experience occurred when we leased an Arabian mare in poor condition—the circumstances

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would require a book, but suffice it to say, when she had the baby, the filly was so weak with bones like spaghetti that she could not stand and nurse. We were able to milk the colostrum from the mare by using a large syringe with the tip cut off. Placing the cut plastic edge over the teat, we slowly pulled back on the plunger; the vacuum created drew the colostrum into the tube. We then transferred it to another clean, large syringe and into the baby's mouth it went. Since the mare also had a retained placenta (the only one in 40 yrs. of breeding!), the vet did have to come and give her extra hormones which successfully dealt with that issue. He also drew blood for an *Igg* on the baby because of the nursing difficulty—it turned out very high. It took the filly about two days to be strong enough to stand and nurse properly on her own and during that time it was our privilege to support the baby as she nursed every hour! Again, knowing what we know today and with the new products available, this mare also would have been on the **BreederPac** and **HES** as extras all the way through. We *do* live and learn!

Each special situation is indeed unique so follow your instincts as to how to deal with it. If a vet's attentions are needed, then call one—do not hesitate! It will be your personal decision whether to follow the standard advise fully or only partially depending on your comfort and knowledge level. We have always found it beneficial, if at all possible, to work with a vet familiar with holistic concepts.

ORPHAN FOALS

Occasionally, despite the most careful attention, the unthinkable happens and a mare will perish during or shortly after foaling. If the baby is at least 3-6 weeks of age, the aforementioned mash/gruel should be just fine. Younger foals will need milk of some sort and newborns must receive some colostrum if at all possible.

Fortunately there are some colostrum banks available, usually through your nearest vet school. Another possible source would be www.cyberfoal.com. You can also check with local breeders to see if anyone has colostrum to spare or, if you have another mare foaling at the same time, draw some from her as we described in the Special Situations section. Breeders can also “bank” colostrum from their own mares and in their own freezers (up to 2 years), drawing up to 1 cup per mare from new moms, but only after their own baby has nursed a few times. Be sure to thaw frozen colostrum in warm water and not in the microwave which will destroy enzymes and antibodies. The foal can only absorb colostrum for 12 hours, and it will need 6-8 cups during it's first 8 hrs of life, so time is of the essence.

As for the milk itself, while there are milk replacers on the market, even better would be raw goat milk diluted 2:1 with distilled water or lime water. It must be raw as any heat or pasteurization will destroy the enzymes necessary for the foal to be able to digest it. Cows milk is not a very acceptable replacement. Because mare's milk is extremely high in sugar content, adding 4 teaspoons of pectin per quart of diluted goat milk is advisable. Of course you may find a foal milk replacer at your local vet supply or feed store although most only carry calf milk replacer. If you must use a calf formula, be sure it contains an **animal protein source** rather than plant derived. With either foal or calf replacer, dilute a little more than directions call for. Some well-meaning individuals may also suggest adding mineral oil to prevent constipation. No horse, let alone an orphan foal, can digest oil, so we prefer adding a few drops of **DynaPro** to each bottle to activate gut bacteria.

Which brings up the bottle issue. A lamb bottle and nipple works well, but make sure the hole is small enough that

the milk does not flow out in a stream when held upside down. Human baby nipples work fine for newborns. Usually a foal will suck on anything available, so it is pretty easy to get the baby to take the nipple. You can stick a couple of fingers in its mouth and tickle the palate to start the sucking, then insert the nipple and reflex sucking begins. Make sure the baby's nose is not higher than its eye level as you don't want to drown it. Also make sure all bottles and nipples are scrupulously clean!

Foals will generally work up to eating about **4-5 gallons** of milk or replacer a day, so if you are feeding every 2 hours, a little over a quart per feeding would be appropriate. Ideally, smaller feedings every hour would be better for the first week or two. Some people work toward teaching the foal to drink from a bucket; let the foal suck your fingers and then put your hand down into the bucket. Once they learn this skill, you can hang the bucket of milk or formula in the stall with several hours worth of feedings in it, and get some sleep, while the baby drinks at will. Or use a calf nursing bucket with a nipple coming off from it. If your foal is getting its milk from a bucket 2-3 times per day, add about 2-3 cc's **DynaPro** per bucket.

After about 3 or 4 weeks, start adding some **PGR** pellets to the foal's bucket, building up to a nice mash. By the time it is 3 months old, it should be totally onto dry **PGR** (build up to about 4-6# per day—one quart weighs 1.5#), **HES** (build up to about 1/2 pound—orphans need this!) and **Dynamite Regular** (starting with just a few pellets and building up to 1/2 oz.), plus of course the free choice grass hay and free choice **DYNAMITE**[®] minerals which will have always been present.

WEANING & ONWARD

Mare's milk changes in nutritional content after about 3 months as nature prepares the foal to be able to survive on its own. At this time, we reduce mom's **PGR** and **HES** amounts and drop the **Dynamite Regular** down to normal amounts for the mare's size based on 1 1/2 oz. per 1000# - no less, especially if she is rebred. It is at this time that we start to offer the baby it's creep-feed ration of 1 cup **PGR**, 1/2 oz. **Dynamite Regular** and 1 squirt of **DynaPro** per feeding. Of course the baby will have been snatching mouthfuls from mom's bucket from a week or so on! The amount of pellets should slowly increase as the foal gets closer to weaning age, which is 4-6 months for foals with moms and about 3 months for orphans. By weaning, they are eating all they need (4-6# **PGR**, 1/4 cup **HES**, 1/2 oz. **Dynamite Regular**, & 1 squirt **DynaPro** broken into at least 3 feedings per day or free choice), to stay strong and healthy with no going off feed due to emotional stress. If your foal looks a bit thin, add some more **PGR** (no more than 1.5# per feeding, PLEASE) and/or more **HES**; if it looks a bit porky, cut back on **PGR** and only feed perhaps 1/4 cup **HES** along with the 1/2 oz. **Dynamite Regular** (building up to 1 oz. as yearling and up to 2 oz per day for big 2 yr olds). Always offer the free choice hay and mineral buffet and of course, always plenty of clean, fresh water. Also continue with daily **DynaPro** until the youngster is 2 yrs old.

Of course **DYNAMITE**[®] does come out with product variations and many individuals have found the new **TNT** to be a fabulous broodmare (full dose) and foal (half dose) feed along with the free choice minerals and **DynaPro**. Experiment a bit to find what works best for you. You will be amazed at the difference you see in your **DYNAMITE**[®] foals! ■