

This is a brief overview of what we think is important for foaling but it is definitely NOT designed to take the place of reading books and articles on foaling, nor, especially, the advice of your veterinarian – just some observations discovered over the last 40 years of breeding. Probably the most important thing to remember is that each mare is an individual – do not take any of this as writ in stone – these are GENERAL observations or suggestions. And with that caveat, we'll begin.

NUTRITION

What is the first thing a doctor or midwife tells a pregnant woman? Why, to eat properly and take pre-natal vitamins and minerals! It is no different for broodmares. Despite the fact that most veterinarians don't suggest increasing nutrition until the fifth month, we go along with the holistic vets who suggest increasing nutrition even a year before conception. Many researchers have found that minerals are of prime importance for the growing foal in order to insure proper bone, ligament and organ growth. For more detailed information on the diet we follow, please read our other information about the DYNAMITE® Program. We believe this optimum approach encourages the foals to achieve their optimum genetic potential.

DUE DATE

The most common way of figuring due dates is by taking the last breeding date and adding 11 months + 5 days. But, like their human counterparts, mares will be very individualistic in their 'cooking' process, so don't hang your hat on your calculations. You can at least get in the ballpark and know if a foal is premature. If a baby comes more than 2 weeks early, you could have a serious problem so consult immediately with your veterinarian. On the other hand, mares have been known to go 12 and even 13 months, so sometimes you have to be prepared for a long wait. Most veterinarians rightly refuse to induce labor for the owner's convenience – that medical procedure should only be undertaken if there's a serious medical reason; trust your vet on this one or get a second opinion.

STALL

Much can be said for a mare foaling out in a nice clean, green pasture. As long as there are no other horses who would try to steal her baby (*all too common with low-on-the-totem-pole mares and/or new moms*) and if it's late enough in the year for weather not to be problematical, this can be great – you check one morning and there's the new arrival! For those who desire to have more control of the proceedings by having a stall or enclosure foaling, be sure the space is large enough – a standard 10 x 10' box stall is way too small for a safe delivery. We have individual foaling areas of 12 x 16' and a special box stall of 16 x 24' if any real difficulty is encountered. The size is necessary so the mare has room to lay down without coming up against a wall. If you're using pipe panels as all or part of your foaling area, it's wise to at least have a 2 x 12" board along the bottom so the baby can't roll under – yes, that can happen with fatal results. If other horses can come right up (*and they will!* - *they're more curious than cats*), you might wire plywood around so the mare can feel totally safe. It's been known to happen, that, as she turns to chase off an

'intruder', an out-coming foal gets its neck broken against the enclosure. It's a good idea to start letting the mare get used to this new area at least 2 weeks, preferably a month, before her due date.

FENCING

Be sure that both run and turn-out fencing is truly safe for foals. While it seems very inexpensive initially, barbed wire really can become incredibly expensive when babies (and not just babies!) get ripped up and need expensive repair or even euthanasia. Unfortunately, smooth wire, used frequently in electric fences (try banding instead), can do almost as much damage. The safest type of fencing is V-mesh, or horse fencing (small rectangular meshes), or even cyclone fencing. Poles or boards, whether wood or vinyl, are also fine as long as they're close to the ground. Most pipe panels have too much space at the bottom, but some are acceptable. It's surprising how tiny a space a foal can slip through if they're laying against a fence, and they do, so it's far better to be safe than sorry.

BEDDING

The only safe bedding for foals is clean, bright straw or even hay. Sawdust can cause respiratory problems and infections, while shavings can nick corneas. If the mare is spending her nights in the foaling stall (*they tend to foal in the wee hours of the morning*), be sure it's cleaned daily. After foaling, be sure it's cleaned again as soon as possible without unduly disturbing the bonding process of mom and baby. Even in a pasture situation, lay out a supply of fresh straw – the mare will appreciate the foaling bed, and the foal (*for about 3 months*) needs a nice dry place in which to rest. If you do not supply this, the baby can become ill from exhaustion, damp ground, etc.

SIGNS

In addition to the standard signs of foaling, our experience over the last 36+ years has also led us to look for the following:

- enlarged bag with the teats taut and firm (*'milk veins' will have enlarged earlier right down the belly*)
- 'waxing', caused by the colostrum (*first milk and vital for foal's healthy immune system*) hardening on the teats – some mares do not produce colostrum until after the baby's born and too much leakage can cause a shortage
- enlarged loose vulva (*begin checking external genitalia early so you know the difference!*) - this can happen within the last few hours, but it is truly an absolute as the mare cannot foal without dilating
- know that every mare will do her own thing!

WATCHING

Many new 'parents' really want to observe the process, but since horses are prey animals, most prefer privacy. There's numerous tales told of finally taking a quick bathroom or dinner break and returning to find the deed accomplished. And just to belie that, we have a story of a mare who waited for her girl to be there! It's a good idea to at least keep some kind of watch though in case help is needed:

- if only one foot appears after numerous contractions (*both feet followed by a nose is what you want*)
- if nothing is happening after an hour (*or less, use your head*) of labor – most labors are under 30 minutes or so
- bleeding or excessive sweating
- water broken and nothing happens

In any of these instances, or if you feel at all concerned with how the birth is progressing, **call your vet.**

Overall, though, we believe strongly in non-interference. Take the membrane off the baby's nose, but no more. Don't 'help' the mare by helping to pull the baby out. Or the placenta, either – sometimes it takes a while for the mare to expel it on her own, but the baby's nursing should take care of that. Nor do mares need you to "cut the cord." Again, be in contact with and follow your vet's advice – but also educate yourself as to serious warning signs.

AFTER

Well, your new baby is here; now what? It's best not to leave until you see the baby nurse, poop and pee; you want to be sure that what goes in can come out. Newborns' feces are dark and tarry – quite normal. Some vets like to encourage the first bowel movement with injections – we prefer non-interference, and **DYNAMITE® DynaPro**, for healthy foals. The baby should be strong enough to nurse within a couple of hours of birth; if it doesn't either because of weakness or mom not allowing it, you do need to step in.

A young first mom of ours wouldn't let her very aggressive colt nurse; every time he butted her bag (*yes, that's how they do it*) she'd squeal and move away – other than that, she was doing fine in her bonding by licking him and sniffing him, etc. We deduced she didn't like the discomfort of the butting on the taut bag, so we gave her some homeopathic herbal relaxant, **DYNAMITE® Relax**, orally and sprayed another, **DYNAMITE® Release**, directly onto her bag - instant letdown and he was able to nurse.

It's also a good idea to treat the navel with a very mild iodine solution to prevent infection; ask your vet but be sure to wear rubber gloves or you'll go around with orange hands/arms for days! Many holistically inclined people prefer **DYNAMITE® Solace**, a colorless, odorless colloidal silver which doesn't sting or over-dry the stump - it can be used on all sorts of wounds.

And be sure to check the placenta for horn holes – if you don't feel OK in doing that, save it in a bucket for the vet to check.

IMPRINTING

While this has received huge attention in recent years due to Dr. Miller's book, we're concerned about the number of 1000# plus adults who've learned no boundaries. Following our general attitude of non-interference, we believe strongly in allowing mom and baby to bond thoroughly first: Equus magazine states 48 hours is necessary for the true mare/foal bond. Later, do all the desensitization you'd like to, always moving slowly and carefully. The best assurance for a human-oriented foal is to have a gentle, human-oriented dam. A mare which is fearful or otherwise unaccepting of people will teach that trait to her foal, plus mad moms are dangerous to all. ~

WEANING

This can be an incredibly stressful time for both dam and foal. In

order to reduce or eliminate unnecessary stress, we simply close mom off into an **adjoining** paddock with a good shared fence; each can see and smell the other so there is no panic if done in a timely and matter-of-fact manner (we let the pair tell us by their drifting apart in daily ramblings). Leaving them close for a few weeks before removal to permanent quarters has made *our* sleep a lot quieter!

IN CONCLUSION

Read foaling books and articles, be sure you have your vet's emergency number and that s/he is alerted, prepare both the foaling area and yourself and then **relax** (*actually, horses can easily pick up on human nervousness*) – Mother Nature's been producing foals a lot longer than we have! ■

From John Lyons' Perfect Horse, 12/97

SIGNS OF LABOR

- agitation & pacing
- decreased appetite
- frequent passage of small amounts of urine & manure
- light sweating, which may become pronounced
- signs of abdominal discomfort similar to colic

DON'T EVER EVEN . . .

- enter the stall unless you are absolutely needed
- pull on the foal
- cut the cord unless it is under excessive tension
- attempt to force foal to nurse
- towel off the foal
- assist the foal to stand
- use flash bulbs if taking photos
- pull on the placenta
- go to bed until the foal has gotten to its feet to successfully nurse and urinate/defecate
- hesitate to call the vet if you want to

NEWBORN CHECKLIST

- put a [clean] finger into its ear - it should respond by shaking its head or twitching the ear
- put your [clean] finger into its mouth - this should trigger a strong sucking response
- clap your hands - foal should respond in some obvious way to sharp sounds
- approach the foal - it should seem interested, looking in your direction and probably extending its muzzle

CALL THE VET IF . . .

- mare has been obviously straining for 10 minutes or so with no progress
- part of the foal becomes visible but retracts repeatedly without progress
- only one foot & the nose, or two feet & no nose, presents itself with no progress
- rump presents itself first
- newborn foal seems distressed with head & neck extended, mouth open, working to breathe
- newborn has not stood and nursed within 2 hrs. of birth
- mare has not expelled placenta within 2 hrs. of birth
- mare remains down after foal is up - especially if she is breathing heavily, sweating or showing other signs of distress or depression
- you feel better with your vet in attendance