

If a horse requires **extra calories** for healthy **weight gain**, the best **horse feed** is usually one that is very digestible, tasty, and based on **fibre** and/or **oil** rather than being packed with **starch**. For many horses, the safest route is a energy-rich feed that helps maintain **gut health**, provides **slow-release energy**, and fits a sensible **balanced ration** based on **forage first**.

In simple terms, that often means a well-formulated **complete horse feed**, a calorie-rich **horse feed mix**, or specific **concentrates** alongside reliable **forage** such as **hay** or **haylage**. The best choice depends on **body condition score**, **workload**, age, chewing ability, and whether the horse needs condition improvement without excess excitement.

Why horses need extra calories

Not every horse that looks lean needs the same method. A horse's **condition score** helps show whether the issue is mild lack of cover or genuine underfeeding. If the score is low, the horse may need extra usable energy, better access to **forage**, or a more suitable **feed rate** rather than simply bigger meals.

Workload is one of the most common reasons horses need more calories. A horse in harder work burns more energy and may struggle to hold condition on forage alone. Youngsters, older horses, poor doers, and some horses recovering from illness may also lose **weight** even when they appear to be eating well.

Before changing the diet, look at what the horse already gets. Low-quality forage, limited grazing, stress, dental issues, parasite burden, or a ration that is too low in energy density can all contribute to **weight loss**. In many cases, improving the base diet is more helpful than simply adding more **concentrates**.

Forage should always come first because it supports chewing, saliva production, and hindgut function. If the current forage is **overweight horse feed** poor, switching to better quality **hay** or adding suitable **haylage** may make more impact to condition than changing balancers alone.

Types of horse feed for adding calories

There are a number of **types of horse feed** that can help with calorie intake, and the ideal option depends on how the horse handles fibre, starch, and fat. The main goal is to boost calorie density without disrupting digestion or leading to excess excitability.

A **complete horse feed** is designed to provide a full nutrient package in one product when fed at the recommended level. Many complete feeds are practical for owners who want a easy way to support body condition and daily nutrition without building a complex ration from scratch.

A **horse feed mix** usually combines cereals, fibre sources, vitamins, and minerals. Some mixes are formulated for condition, while others are intended for fitness or stamina. These can be useful when a horse needs extra calories, but the starch content and overall nutrient profile should be checked carefully.

Concentrates are energy-dense feeds fed in smaller amounts alongside forage. They can be helpful for horses with higher calorie needs, but they should be introduced slowly and split into sensible meals. The best concentrates often use **oil** and digestible fibre to deliver energy with less starch.

Some feeds are marketed as **energy-dense feed** options for poor doers and horses in work. These products may include beet pulp, alfalfa, soya hulls, oil, and fibre blends that support **palatability** and encourage intake. A good product should also support the **hindgut** rather than disrupt it.

How to select the ideal horse feed

Choosing the ideal **horse feed** for extra calories is less about brand names and really about the feed's makeup. The main factors are **digestibility**, **fibre**, **oil**, and **starch**.

High **digestibility** means the horse can obtain more **digestible energy** from each mouthful. This matters because a feed with good digestibility can improve condition without requiring huge volumes. Feeds based on digestible fibre sources often suit horses with sensitive digestion and those needing steady condition gain.

Fibre-based feeds are often a strong choice because they support the hindgut and tend to deliver **slow-release energy**. Ingredients such as beet pulp, chopped fibre, and alfalfa can raise calorie intake while helping the horse feel settled. This is particularly useful for [affordable native pony feed UK](#) horses that need condition without too much sharp energy.

Oil is a concentrated calorie source and can boost calorie density without the same starch load as cereal-heavy feeds. It is often used in conditioning and **performance nutrition** because it can improve stamina and help maintain a steady energy supply. Oil-based calories are often well suited to horses needing condition improvement and a calmer temperament.

Starch can be helpful in moderation, but too much may not suit every horse. High-starch diets can be less appropriate for horses prone to excitability or digestive upset. For many horses needing extra calories, a lower-starch approach built around fibre and oil is safer and easier to balance.

A useful way to think about feed choice is this: if the horse needs more calories but also good gut support, choose a product with a strong nutrient profile, good digestibility, and a sensible balance of fibre, oil, and only moderate starch.

Complete horse feed vs mix feed versus balancer

The choice between **complete horse feed**, **compound feed**, **horse feed mix**, and **feed balancer** comes down to the amount of the ration that must come from a bag and the amount provided by forage.

A **complete horse feed** can be useful for owners who want an easy approach. It is designed to provide a broad range of **nutrients** when fed at the right level. For a horse that needs additional calories and a straightforward ration, this can be a practical option, notably if forage intake is already good.

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A **compound feed** is a more general term for feeds made from a blend of ingredients to deliver a specific nutritional outcome. Many conditioning products fit into this group. Some are calorie rich, while others are more focused on maintaining condition alongside vitamins and minerals.

A **feed balancer** is different. It is usually fed in a limited quantity to deliver concentrated nutrients, but it does not normally add much energy on its own. A balancer is useful when the diet already contains enough energy from forage and other feeds, but the horse still needs help for a balanced ration.

If extra calories are the main issue, a balancer alone is usually not enough. However, combining a balancer with improved forage and a suitable calorie source can work well. In many cases, the best approach is forage first, then add the appropriate energy feed, then use a balancer if needed to address nutrient gaps.

Horse nutrition rules for safe condition improvement

Good **horse feeding rules** support intestinal health while promoting consistent condition gain. The classic **10 rules of feeding horses** are often summarised differently by different trainers and nutritionists, but the core principles are consistent: forage first, make changes gradually, and avoid large sudden increases in starch or total feed volume.

Ad-lib forage is often the cornerstone of safe weight gain when a horse can tolerate it. Near-unlimited forage supports intake, encourages natural grazing behaviour, and helps maintain gut function. If ad-lib is not possible, forage should still be the main part of the ration.

Small meals are safer than one or two large feeds. This helps the horse digest feed more efficiently and reduces the risk of digestive overload. Concentrates should be split into multiple feeds where possible, especially when calorie needs are rising quickly.

Useful **horse feeding rules** include:

- Build the ration on **forage** first.
- Increase calories gradually.
- Split concentrates into **small meals**.
- Select highly digestible ingredients.
- Avoid **sudden dietary changes**.
- Check body condition regularly.
- Maintain the ration balanced, not just calorie heavy.

If the horse is not gaining despite a good ration, check dental comfort, parasite control, stress, and whether the chosen feed actually matches the horse's workload and metabolism.

Horse feeding chart: feed amount guide

A **horse feeding chart** is a starting point, not a fixed rule. The right amount depends on **bodyweight**, **body condition score**, forage quality, and the horse's daily activity. Bag guidelines are helpful, but they should be tweaked to suit the individual animal.

As a rough guide, a horse needing condition gain usually needs more total **daily intake** than a horse maintaining weight. The ration should rise slowly, and changes should be reviewed at two-week intervals rather than every day.

Here is a basic approach:

- Use good forage and enough to support essential needs.
- Assess current **body condition score**.
- Add a calorie-dense feed if weight gain is needed.
- Step up the feed rate slowly.
- Check again bodyweight and condition regularly.

If the horse is already eating plenty of forage but still losing weight, a stronger calorie source may be needed. If the horse is on a low intake because of poor appetite, palatability becomes just as important as calorie density.

A good **horse feeding chart** should always be read with common sense. Two horses of the same **bodyweight** may need different rations depending on workload, forage quality, and how efficiently they use feed.

Using a horse feed calculator that UK owners can use

A **horse feed calculator uk** owners can trust should work out **calorie requirements** using the horse's **work level**, body size, and the energy value of the forage. This is practical because many horses do not need more feed in general; they need more usable calories matched to their actual use.

Calculators are especially helpful useful when paired with **forage analysis**. Knowing the nutrient value of hay or haylage makes it much easier to judge how much extra energy the ration still needs. Without analysis, owners often estimate, and that can lead to underfeeding or unnecessary overfeeding.

A practical calculator approach should include:

- Estimated **bodyweight**
- Current **body condition score**
- **Work level** and training intensity
- Type and quality of **forage**
- Whether the horse needs **weight gain** or maintenance

If you can, use a calculator alongside feed labels and forage analysis rather than as a standalone answer. This offers a clearer picture of total calorie intake and helps build a better balanced ration.

How much does horse feed cost?

The true **horse feed cost** is not just the **bag price**. It is the cost per day, because a cheaper bag may need a larger daily amount, while a more concentrated feed may look expensive but last longer. So when asking **how much does horse feed cost**, compare both the bag and the feeding rate.

For example, a conditioning feed with a higher calorie density may have a higher bag price but a lower daily usage, so the **cost per day** could be more manageable than expected. A balancer might have a modest bag price per kilogram, but because it is fed in a small amount, it may not solve a calorie deficit on its own.

When comparing products, look at:

- **Price per bag**
- Ideal **feed rate**
- Expected **day-to-day cost**
- If forage needs to be supplied separately
- If the product is a high-calorie feed or just a nutritional top-up

The best value is usually the feed that supports condition well without forcing you to feed large volumes. In many cases, upgrading forage quality and then introducing the right concentrate can be more economical than relying on one pricey product alone.

Horse feed advice for beginners

For **horse feed for beginners**, the key rule is not to complicate the ration. Begin with forage, then build carefully. Practical **horse feed advice uk** typically suggests choosing a simple, suitable feed and changing only one element at a time so you can see what works.

Ration changes should be gradual. Rapid changes can upset the hindgut and reduce appetite. If you are moving from a maintenance ration to a conditioning ration, add the new feed over several days and watch for changes in

droppings, behaviour, and appetite.

If the horse is underweight, has loose droppings, poor teeth, recurrent tummy discomfort, or is not improving as expected, seek **veterinary advice**. Weight loss can have medical causes, and no amount of feed will fix a hidden problem if the underlying issue remains.

Beginner-friendly feeding often works best with a clear structure: forage first, a reliable calorie source, and regular reassessment of condition. That is usually safer than trying to solve poor condition by dramatically increasing one bag feed.

Popular horse feed companies and products

Many **horse feed companies** offer conditioning and performance products aimed at horses needing extra calories. One familiar example is **spillers horse feed**, which has a range that includes conditioning and performance options designed to support different workloads and body types.

When looking at products from different brands, pay attention to function rather than marketing. A good **conditioning feed** should help with calorie intake, support palatability, and suit the horse's digestive needs. A **performance feed** may be the better choice for horses in harder work that need fuel for both condition and exercise.

The best products typically blend digestible fibre, controlled starch, and enough oil to boost calorie density. Many horse feed companies now offer feeds aimed at more controlled condition gain rather than just cereal-heavy energy, which can be beneficial for horses that need weight without becoming sharp.

Brand choice is less important than matching the feed to the horse's needs. Read the nutrient profile, check the feed rate, and decide whether the product is a complete ration, a compound feed, or a top-up alongside forage and a balancer.

Common mistakes when feeding horses for weight gain

Even good **horse feeding rules** can fail if the ration is built badly. One of the biggest mistakes is **overfeeding** cereal-heavy products in the belief that more calories always mean better condition. Too much starch can cause digestive upset and may not give the calm, steady gain the horse needs.

Another problem is **sudden changes**. The digestive system needs time to adapt, especially when moving to a richer ration. Abrupt changes can disturb the hindgut and increase the risk of colic.

Colic risk rises when horses are given large feeds, poor-quality forage, or rapid changes in diet. This is why calorie increases should be built around steady forage intake and conservative changes to concentrates.

Other common mistakes include:

- Ignoring poor forage quality
- Using a feed that is too low in digestible energy
- Feeding too much starch too quickly
- Not checking body condition regularly
- Assuming a balancer will add enough calories

The safest approach is gradual condition improvement with the horse's digestion in mind. That usually means choosing a balanced ration, watching the horse's response, and adjusting in small steps.

FAQ: horse feed questions answered

What is the best horse feed for horses requiring extra calories?

The best **horse feed** for horses needing extra calories is usually a highly digestible, appetising feed with a robust fibre and/or oil base, balanced starch, and a defined calorie target. A quality **complete horse feed**, a conditioning **horse feed mix**, or carefully chosen **concentrates** can all do the job, but the right choice depends on **body condition score**, **workload**, and how well the horse handles starch. For many horses, the most sensible route is **forage first** with added calorie-dense feed if needed.

Should I choose complete horse feed or a mix feed?

A **complete horse feed** is often best if you want straightforward feeding and a feed that supplies a full range of **nutrients** in one product. A **horse feed mix** can also be useful, especially if it is designed as a **conditioning feed**. If the horse already gets good forage and only needs nutrient top-up, a **feed balancer** may be enough. If the horse needs real calorie support, a balancer alone usually will not provide enough energy.

How do I use a horse feeding chart to add weight safely?

Use a **horse feeding chart** as a starting point, then adjust for **bodyweight**, **body condition score**, and actual appetite. Start with forage, then raise calories in stages and keep the ration split into **small meals**. Recheck condition every couple of weeks. A chart shows a starting point, but it should not replace careful observation or good **horse feeding rules**.

How much does horse feed cost per day for a horse needing extra calories?

Horse feed cost per day depends on the product's **bag price**, calorie density, and feeding rate. A more concentrated feed may cost more per bag but less per day, while a cheaper feed may need a larger amount and end up costing more overall. When asking **how much does horse feed cost**, compare the **cost per day** rather than the bag alone.

What are the key horse feeding rules to use when boosting calories?

The primary **horse feeding rules** are: maintain **forage** as the foundation, raise feed step by step, avoid **sudden dietary changes**, use **small meals** rather than big ones, and pick a ration that supports **gut health**. In practice, the most effective way to add calories is to improve the forage base, then add a suitable energy source with the right balance of **fibre**, **oil**, and **starch**.