

Home » Should My Horse Exercise on an Empty Stomach?

Should My Horse Exercise on an Empty Stomach?

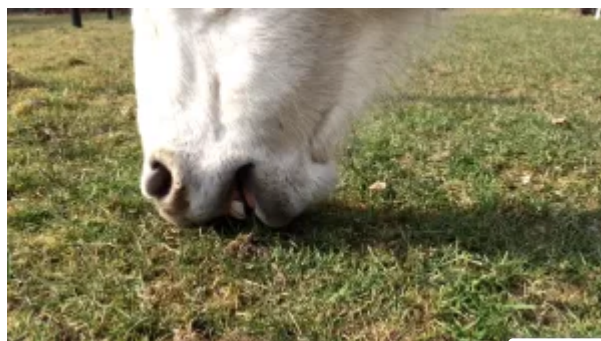
19 March 2019 | Food, Health | Leave a comment

This is the title of an [article](#) in [theHorse.com](#) yesterday, 18 March 2019.

The question is answered by Clair Thunes PhD, an 'equine nutritionist'. This qualification is itself very questionable; like the veterinary reliance on the farrier, believing in tradition rather than science, the world of equine nutrition is also one based very much on tradition. Both have a passing acknowledgment of the real science but neither accept it fully. So we still see horses being fed all manner of things rubbish or unnecessary : grains, cereals, molasses, haylage, sugar-beet pulp, alfalfa etc...

So what is Thunes' answer: '...veterinarians now generally understand that horses should have some amount of food in their stomach, ideally, at all times. Any veterinary surgeon who DOES NOT know this, is not worth his salt – saying they 'generally understand' is a very poor reflection on the veterinary profession –it is not my intention to comment here on the current level of veterinary thinking, rather on the statement.

The author goes on to describe how food protects the stomach, explaining the existence of the protected [lower third] and unprotected [upper two-thirds of the] stomach lining and how the normal food of the horse forms a buffer, preventing stomach acid splashing onto the unprotected lining. She also explains that meal feeds will not create such a buffer.

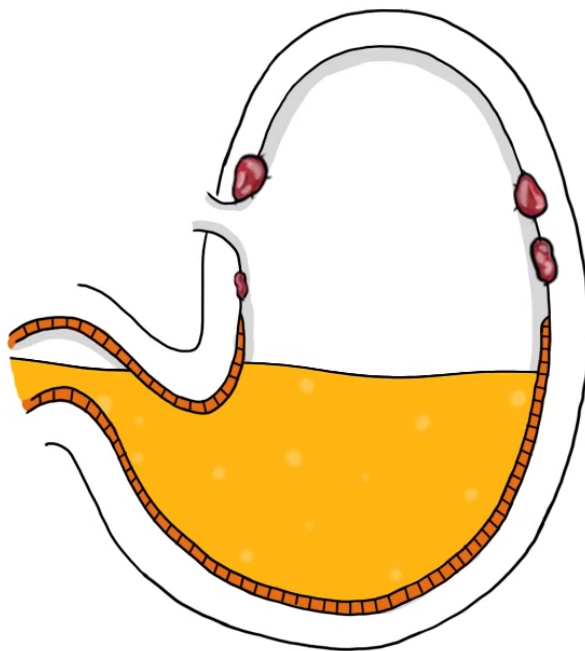


Horse grazing on short grass

She then goes on to explain that 'after your horse has finished eating, it takes only about 6 hours for

the majority of that meal to leave the stomach.’ This is a clear lack of knowledge for an equine nutritionist. Unlike the human stomach, which plays a significant role in the digestion of food, the equine stomach has very little involvement in the actual process of digestion, nor even preparation. The main function of the equine stomach is to act as a sort of ‘holding pen’ for food. The size of the stomach, relative to the size of the animal is one of the determining factors here. For an animal so large, the stomach is of very restricted proportions and cannot contain any notable quantity of food for any significant period of time. This is in fact in keeping with the escape mechanism of the horse. An overfull stomach would be detrimental to any fast action and to this end, the horse is required to eat relatively small quantities regularly.

As a result, the time that the food remains in the horse’s stomach is not 6 hours, it is *only thirty minutes*. Considerably less than the ‘only six hours’ in the article. If only for this reason alone, horses *must* have **permanent** grazing access.



The author rounds up by talking of preventing ulcers. The first sentence begins ‘The best thing you can do when your horse hasn’t eaten for several hours before a ride’...surely this is closing the gate after the horse has bolted. The fact that the horse has not eaten *for several hours* means that it is already exposed to the danger of stomach ulcers – recent research has identified that *80 – 85% of horses has stomach ulcers*. She goes on to talk about alfalfa being high in calcium (basic) and *this* combating the acid of the stomach but alfalfa, also known as lucerne, is excessively high in

proteins and can cause notable negative reactions elsewhere. She also notes the availability of buffering and coating supplements.

But surely there is one simple –and cheap– answer. Feed your horse *as he is meant to feed*. Permanent access to grazing; a mixture of grasses, weeds etc. and at times of shortage, the winter, for example, good quality hay. It is oft bemoaned that good quality hay is too expensive to feed all the time but it will always be cheaper than the enormous quantity of inappropriate meal feeds and supplements given. And if you still think the hay is too expensive, then mix it with slightly lesser quality hay...it will still server perfectly.

◀ Cereal ◀ Exercise ◀ Grain ◀ Nutrition ◀ Stomach Ulcers

PREVIOUS POST

Veterinary Madness



Sabots Libres

View posts by Sabots Libres

RELATED POSTS



Cushing Candidate?

29 July 2017

Autumn is in the Air

30 September 2016

Spring is in the Air

20 March 2016

[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

LEAVE A REPLY

Enter your comment here...

© mmx - mmxix Sabots Libres : English.

