Essential Mare Owners Guide: Key Signs to Watch for During Foaling Time

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Tulips are blooming, lawns are being mown and around Newmarket many of the Thoroughbred foals are already practising galloping around the paddocks of their prestigious stud farms. However, non-Thoroughbred breeders are likely still eagerly

watching mares bloom, ready to foal in early summer.

Having foaled over 1,000 mares during his career, we spoke to expert Darrell Tampin, General Manager at Aislabie Stud, to get his advice on what to look out for to help your mare have a success foaling whatever breed she may be.

For the last trimester (last 3 months of pregnancy) you need to ensure your mare is on an appropriate stud feed. During this time the foetus does the majority of its growing - two-thirds of foetal growth occurs in the last third of pregnancy. Depending on your mare's body condition, you you should gradually introduce a suitable stud feed or balancer during month eight. At Aislabie Stud they feed the Thoroughbred mares SPILLERS Stud and Yearling Cubes morning and evening but for native types and good doers, SPILLERS Gro N' Win Balancer is often sufficient to supply the essential nutrients required for foetal growth and milk production without excess calories. Mares should not be encouraged to be overweight as this could increase complications.

On the TB studs the mares start coming in at night six weeks before their due date to get into a new routine early and allow the staff to monitor them more closely and assess changes. Mares are checked daily to see how their udder (or bag) is developing and ensure there's no sign of vulval discharge. Once the bag is looking full you may also see some wax developing on the teats, and the muscles of the hindquarters should start to relax or soften. From these signs they generally estimate the mare might foal in the next five days. Maiden mares (first time mums) may have smaller bags and are more likely to catch you by surprise. When foaling is imminent mares may begin to sweat up, become restless and may 'run' milk as well.

The big studs have up to three people present to assist the mare with foaling and have experienced teams, so you may want to have your vet on standby if you're not confident in what you're looking for during the actual foaling. Once the mare's waters break, a vet or experienced stud hand will feel if the 2 front legs and nose are engaged in the right way and a white bag will soon appear. At this point the mare will generally lay down and foal naturally with little intervention.

You should call your vet in an emergency, for example, if you notice the foal's front feet aren't poking out first or the nose is not sitting just above them. Even if the mare has foaled normally but has a red bag presentation, or you notice any signs of the foal looking distressed or struggling to breathe you should call your vet. The same applies if the mare looks to be in excess pain or is bleeding a lot. Follow your gut instinct if you think anything is wrong.

Usually, foals stand within 45 minutes and should be 'on suck' within 1.5-2 hours. Assuming the foal can stand well (some may have contracted legs and need assistance) they should show a suck reflex and be looking for the milk bar. If not, this could be a sign of dummy foal

syndrome, another sign the foal needs to be seen by a vet. Look for a positive interaction between the mare and foal, on very rare occasions mares may reject their foals.

Foals will be turned out in nursery paddocks from day one if they are standing and suckling well. Big studs will routinely check the levels of IGG (antibodies) in the mare's milk with a refractometer 12-24 hours post foaling, your vet may offer to do this. This gauges transfer of passive immunity, and bloods may be taken from all foals when given a general health check by the vet. For the first week after foaling the foal will have its navel sprayed daily and temperatures will be taken and monitored twice daily. Darrell's team will weigh the foals on day one, day three and one week post foaling and look for the foal to be gaining approx. 1-2kgs per day. (TB foals will generally be around 50-55kgs at birth so weight gain would be proportionally less or more in other breeds).



Monitor your mare closely for signs of colic after foaling. On rare occasions mares may haemorrhage (internal bleeding) - the mare will start to shake all over - again call a vet if you have any concerns.

The TB studs commonly keep mares and foals in nursery paddocks until the foals reach one month of age and then pair them up and turn them out into larger paddocks once the limbs are looking straighter and the foals are stronger. Some may pair up earlier if their friendly field companions have foaled at a similar time.

Mares not overweight will be fed the SPILLERS Stud and Youngstock Cubes twice a day. Many studs don't tend to use 'creep feeds' as they have excellent hay and grass, and foals will nibble their mares feeds anyway. Some may try and steal mum's food after just a few days, but most don't normally start until around 4 weeks old. This may depend on the mare's body condition and milk production - keep a watchful eye that she's not drying up. Ensure your mare's feed is suitable for their thieving foals to eat too.

For more specific information on what to feed your mare through their last trimester and throughout lactation call our experienced team of nutrition specialists who will be able to point you in the right direction of what's best for your mare and foal! SPILLERS Care-Line 01908 226626

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