Showstopper shine: how diet can help
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There’s little more pleasing to the eye than a gleaming coat but achieving this badge of honour is about more than just good grooming (although this is essential!). Here we explain how your horse’s diet can help to create showstopper shine.

First step – think outside the bucket!

The biggest influence on coat condition is your horse’s overall health so it pays to start with the basics which includes regular dental check-ups, staying on top of worming/ faecal egg counts and looking out for signs that may indicate an underlying health condition. If you have concerns over any of these aspects of your horse’s management, speak to your vet for advice.

A healthy digestive system is the foundation of a healthy horse so wherever possible, feed as much forage as your horse will eat (while avoiding excessive waste). If they’re overweight, remember that total forage intake should not be restricted to less than 1.5% of current bodyweight per day on a dry matter basis. On an ‘as fed’ basis – the amount you need to weigh out – this is equivalent to approximately 9kg of hay for a 500kg horse without grazing (or 11kg if you intend to soak it before feeding). Making sense of the different feeding rates and managing grass intake can feel daunting, so for practical, tailored advice, consider contacting a nutrition specialist.



A balanced diet

Nutrient deficiencies can affect coat condition, quality and growth so providing your horse with a well-balanced diet is the key to producing a healthy horse on the inside, as well as a lovely shiny coat on the outside. Some of the powerhouse nutrients when it comes to coat condition include:

- Good quality protein, particularly sulphur-containing amino acids (the building blocks of proteins) such as methionine which are important for hair production.
- Vitamins A and E
- Zinc and copper

Oil

Oil provides a source of essential fatty acids and can be the icing on the cake when it comes to achieving conker-like shine but remember, it’s highly calorific! A small amount (30-50mls for a 500kg horse) won’t pile on the pounds but remember it’s no substitute for providing a balanced diet. For poor doers and those with high energy (calorie)

requirements, feeds high in oil as opposed to cereal starch help to support digestive health, while also providing fatty acids to help support skin and coat health. If you prefer to feed oil from a bottle (or high oil feeds without added vitamins and minerals), it’s important to ensure the total diet provides enough vitamin E so consider contacting a nutrition specialist for advice before adding oil on top your current feed.

Beyond coat shine

Providing a balanced diet is one of the best ways you can you support your horse’s overall health and wellbeing, and, in most cases, this can easily be achieved by feeding the recommended amount of a suitable feed (mixes, cubes, mashes and fibre feeds all count if they contain added vitamins and minerals) or balancer.

Vitamins and minerals are involved in a myriad of essential roles including:

- Producing blood cells
- Blood clotting
- Regulating fluid balance
- Producing certain hormones
- Muscle contractions – include those that make your horse’s heartbeat!
- Development and maintenance of healthy bones and teeth
- Maintaining respiratory, muscle and immune health

The beauty of balancers

Forage, whether it be grass, hay, haylage can easily meet if not exceed calorie requirements for many horses and in these situations, a balancer is the ideal way to provide essential nutrients, without promoting weight gain. These powerful little pellets are packed with vitamins, minerals and amino acids to balance shortfalls in forage and thanks to the low feeding rate – typically just 500g per day for a 500kg horse – they add minimal calories, starch and sugar to the diet. While broad spectrum vitamin and mineral supplements are also designed to balance forage, they contain little if any amino acids.

For advice on ensuring your horse receives the nutrients they need to stay healthy inside and out, contact our team of friendly nutrition specialists.

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