

Hard Keeper ??????????

Hard keepers don't need to be a perpetual problem. If you have a hard keeper- here are some suggestions that can help.

In many cases, in fact over 50% of hard keepers are the result of parasites. Worming every 3-4 months is wise to avoid this problem. Horses will maintain better condition and less feed will be consumed if dewormed on a regular basis. Keep in mind; wormers should be varied each time as resistance to the same medication can occur causing a good wormer to become ineffective.

The next common issue in hard keepers, is a problem with their teeth. Teeth grind together as a horse chews causing wear. Top teeth are set slightly wider causing uneven wear. These sharp edges cause lacerations in the soft tissue in the mouth. This can be very painful causing your horse to not eat. Have your vet check your horse's teeth at least once a year for any possible dental issues.

Although less common than dental issues or parasites, metabolism may be the area of concern. Sometimes genetic, sometimes physical problems cause an inability to properly metabolize the nutrients your horse consumes. However, a ration higher in energy density, consisting of quality fat, quality fibre and increased vitamin and mineral levels, can assist such a horse. Also, the organic versions of these nutrients (such as those found in Equine Signature) are more available and more easily metabolized.

There are many good supplements on the market today but using more than one supplement at a time can cause you more problems than you might expect. Certain substances react with one another affecting uptake and transfer of nutrients to the appropriate site. Often the end result is the opposite of that which is intended, when supplements are combined. This can be to be harmful to your horse and even quite costly.

Feed 5 lbs., *maximum*, at one feeding. Feeding more than this can cause the stomach acids to spill over the killing the digestive bacteria. Without these important bacteria, feed passes through the horse not fully digested. Feed 5 lbs. or less of a quality digestible fat and fibre (ie *Equi-MAX*), and increase the number of feedings. This will allow for more complete digestion resulting in less waste, better health for your horse, and savings in your wallet.

So, you have a hard keeper? Begin a regular deworming schedule (every 3-4 months and alternate dewormer product), check teeth every year and be sure your feed contains the nutrients necessary for proper metabolization. If these do not give you the desired result, check the ration. Hay should be tested and ration balanced specifically for the hard keeper based on breed, activity level and stage of development. Re-evaluate the ration as the horse reaches its desired weight.