

Can horse feed cause colic?

Yes, **horse feed** can play a role in **colic**, especially when it is inappropriate for the horse's needs, given in the wrong amounts, or changed too quickly. Colic is not a single disease but a sign of **abdominal pain**, and feeding plays a major role in maintaining healthy **gut health**.

A horse's **digestive system** is designed to process grazing material for the majority of the day. That means the type of feed, the feeding routine, and the balance between forage and concentrates all matter. In many cases, the issue is not "feed" alone, but how the feed fits into the horse's complete management.

A forage-first approach is usually the best starting point. For most horses, good-quality forage helps sustain the **hindgut**, helps keep digestion steady, and reduces the chance of sudden digestive upset. Problems often start when owners rely too heavily on energy-dense feeds, feed large meals, or make quick changes without enough adjustment time.

It is also important to remember that not every case of colic is feed-related. Parasites, dehydration, dental problems, reduced exercise, and stress can also play a part. Still, feeding choices are one of the most practical areas where owners can reduce risk.

How feed can bring on colic in horses

Some feeds are more likely to irritate the horse's digestive system because they contain higher levels of **starch** and **sugar**. Horses digest these nutrients in a different way from fibre, and if excessive starch reaches the **hindgut**, it can disrupt the microbial balance there. That can cause gas production, irritation, and discomfort.

The hindgut is where fibre fermentation happens. This is central to normal digestion and stable **gut health**. When a horse is fed too many concentrates or a diet that is overly rich, starch can pass through into the hindgut instead of being fully digested in the small intestine. This change in the internal environment may raise the risk of gas colic and other digestive disturbances.

On the other hand, fibre-rich feeds are generally gentler on the digestive system. Fibre supports fermentation, promotes natural movement through the gut, and helps keep the horse occupied. That is why forage is so important. A diet that is low in fibre and high in concentrated energy can upset the balance and make colic more likely.

Feed can also trigger colic indirectly by affecting hydration. Some feeds are dry and need plenty of **access to water** to help the gut function normally. If water intake falls, the risk of impaction increases, because material in the gut can become dry and slow to pass. Salt intake matters too, because adequate salt prompts drinking and supports normal fluid balance.

Digestive upset can happen when the feeding routine changes suddenly, when meal sizes are too large, or when the ration <http://business.theantlersamerican.com/theantlersamerican/markets/article/abnewswire-2026-7-24-with-half-of-britains-horses-overweight-bifid-launches-grain-free-low-sugar-feed-for-the-nations-good-doers/> is not matched to the horse's workload, condition, or temperament. A careful balance of digestibility, fibre, and nutrient balance is key.

The main feeding practices that raise risk

Several typical feeding mistakes can heighten the risk of colic. One of the greatest is making **changes in feed** too fast. Horses need time to adapt to new ingredients, fresh fibre sources, and new energy levels. Abrupt changes can disrupt the microbes in the hindgut and lower digestibility.

Another major risk is feeding too much **concentrated feed** at once. Concentrates are helpful for some horses, especially those needing extra energy, but they should be introduced carefully and fed in sensible quantities. Large concentrate meals can stress the digestive system and leave more starch to be fermented in the hindgut.

Too little **bulk feed** is another problem. When a horse does not get enough forage, the stomach stays empty for longer and the digestive system becomes less stable. Forage helps keep gut movement consistent and supports healthier feeding patterns. It also reduces boredom, which can help some horses with stress-linked digestive issues.

Impaction colic is often linked to feeding and management. Horses may be more vulnerable if they are not drinking enough, are eating very dry feed, are not getting enough forage, or have dental issues that affect chewing. Poorly chewed feed is harder to digest and can slow the passage of material through the gut.

Additional feeding mistakes include:

- Changing turnout and feed at the same time
- Providing large meals instead of **small frequent meals**
- Neglecting body condition and workload
- Not providing enough **available water**
- Choosing a feed that is not suited to the horse's age or activity level

Sound colic prevention starts with consistent management and an understanding of how each choice affects the horse's digestive system.

Varieties of horse feed and how they affect digestion

There are many **types of horse feed**, and each option has a varied effect on digestion, energy supply, and overall health. The most important distinction is usually between forage and concentrated feeds. Forage includes grazing, hay, and haylage, while concentrates include cereal-based and compound feeds designed to add calories or nutrients.

Hay is one of the most traditional and valuable feeds for horse digestive health. It supplies fibre, supports chewing time, and helps keep the gut working steadily. Good hay can form the core of a simple feeding plan for many horses.

Haylage is also a forage, but it has a varying moisture content and preservation method. It can be helpful for some horses because it is often more palatable and dust-reduced, but it is not automatically better for every horse. Suitability depends on the individual horse, how it is stored, and the rest of the ration.

Complete horse feed is designed to deliver both forage and concentrate elements in one product, or to act as a full ration when forage alone is not enough. This can be useful in certain situations, but it still needs to be matched to the horse's nutrient balance, condition score, and workload.

When complete horse feed may be suitable

A **complete horse feed** may be suitable when a horse has trouble to maintain condition on forage alone, when chewing is limited, or when simplicity is important for the feeding routine. It may also help owners who want a

more consistent ration with a known **nutrient balance**.

These feeds are often formulated for enhanced **digestibility** and may contain carefully selected fibre sources, oils, vitamins, and minerals. Some are designed as mash, while others are available as **pellets** or **cubes**. The key is not the format alone, but whether the feed matches the horse's needs and is introduced gradually.

Even complete feed should never replace good management. Horses still need regular schedules, enough water, and adequate time to eat. The ideal feed is the one that promotes health without overloading the digestive system.

Horse feeding rules that help prevent colic

Following sensible **horse feeding rules** can make a real difference to colic prevention. These are often called the **10 rules of feeding horses**, and while different sources may phrase them differently, the core ideas are consistent: offer small meals frequently, make changes slowly, prioritise forage, and encourage proper hydration.

One of the most important rules is to provide **small frequent meals** rather than large meals. This helps prevent overloading the stomach and small intestine, reduces strain on the hindgut, and supports a more stable digestive rhythm.

Other practical rules include:

- Make **gradual introduction** a habit for all new feeds
- Keep the feeding routine as consistent as possible
- Always provide forage before or alongside concentrates
- Ensure clean, regular access to water
- Monitor body condition and adjust feed accordingly
- Check the horse's teeth, worming status, and overall health
- Do not feed hard work horses large meals immediately before exercise
- Keep salt intake appropriate for the horse's workload and climate

The following rules are straightforward, but they are useful because they fit with the horse's natural digestive system rather than opposing it. Good feeding management is often about regularity more than complexity.

A basic horse feeding chart method

A practical **horse feeding chart** does not need to be complicated. For many owners, the best approach is to start with a forage-first plan and then add concentrates only if the horse truly needs them. This makes the ration focused on fibre and minimises unnecessary digestive risk.

A practical chart-style approach can be thought of in 3 steps:

- Review the horse's **condition score**
- Estimate how much forage is needed for maintenance and gut health
- Include concentrates only to bridge a real nutritional gap

The **forage-first** principle means forage should make up the base of the diet. For many horses, that means hay, haylage, or grazing accounts for the majority of the ration, with compound feed used only where extra energy, protein, vitamins, or minerals are needed.

A practical chart also helps owners notice when a horse is drifting away from ideal condition. If the horse is losing weight, the ration may need more digestible energy. If the horse is gaining too much condition, the feed may need to be reduced. Either way, changes should be made gradually and one at a time.

How to work with a horse feed calculator UK owners might come across

A **horse feed calculator uk** calculator can be handy for working out rations, but it should be treated as a starting point rather than a final answer. These tools usually ask for details such as bodyweight, workload, age, and condition. The goal is to create sensible **feeding recommendations** based on the horse's needs.

The most effective calculators support a consistent **feeding routine** rather than encouraging guesswork. They can be useful when assessing products, checking the likely amount of forage needed, or planning a ration for a horse in work. However, they cannot see the individual horse, so owners still need to watch condition, droppings, appetite, and behaviour.

When using a calculator, keep these points in mind:

- Take accurate bodyweight estimates where possible
- Start with forage first, then add other feeds
- Consider workload, age, and condition score
- Adjust the ration after any change in exercise or turnout

Calculated rations are most useful when combined with practical observation and regular reassessment.

Horse feed for those starting out: where to begin

When it comes to **horse feed for beginners**, the safest advice is usually to begin by with forage and introduce more if there is a specific need. High-quality hay or haylage, depending on the horse's requirements, often forms the foundation of a sensible ration. That is a key part of reliable **horse feed advice uk** guidance for new owners.

New owners should focus on understanding what the horse is already eating and whether that diet supports health, energy, and **gut health**. A basic, balanced plan is often better than a complicated one. If the horse holds condition well on forage alone, there may be little need for additional feed beyond a balancer or vitamin and mineral support.

Start by learning how to assess **forage** quality, how much the horse is chewing, whether the horse drinks enough, and whether the current ration suits the work level. This is much more useful than picking the most heavily marketed feed.

For beginners, the main priorities are:

- Choose a forage-based routine
- Carry out any change slowly
- Watch the horse's condition score over time
- Use feed to support health, not just to add volume

Leading brands, companies, and cost considerations

There are many **horse feed companies** producing feeds for different life stages, workloads, and health goals. One well-known example is **spillers horse feed**, which offers a wide range of products for different feeding needs. Brand choice is less important than whether the feed suits the horse and is used correctly.

Horse feed cost varies widely depending on the type of feed, ingredients, and feeding rate. A cheaper feed is not always the best value if it is unsuitable or needs to be fed in large quantities. Likewise, a more expensive feed may be worthwhile if it improves digestibility, supports better nutrient balance, or reduces the need for multiple supplements.

When assessing products, think about the full cost of the ration rather than the price per bag alone. A feed that seems expensive may last longer if the horse only needs a small amount each day. A feed that looks cheaper may ultimately costing more if it fails to meet nutritional needs and has to be replaced.

True value comes from matching the feed to the horse, not from purchasing the lowest-cost option available.

Can you make a horse feed mix recipe at home?

A DIY **horse feed mix recipe** can feel appealing at first, especially for owners who want oversight over ingredients. However, creating a proper ration is not as simple as combining a few ingredients. A homemade mix still needs correct **nutrient balance**, and it must match the horse's forage intake, workload, and health status.

Horse owners at times add **concentrates** like grain, beet pulp, or pelleted feed to create the mix, but it should be done with care. A risk with home mixing is that the ration becomes too high in starch, too low in essential minerals, or too inconsistent from batch to batch. Even minor mistakes can affect digestion and overall wellbeing.

When you are considering a home mix, make sure you know clearly why each ingredient is included. An often better option is frequently to use a professionally formulated product and tailor the forage base around it. That approach is more consistent and generally safer.

DIY feeding can work in some settings, but it should not rely on assumptions. The horse's digestive system needs regularity more than variety.

When to call a vet about colic symptoms

Contact a vet right away if you see **colic symptoms** like pawing, looking at the flank, rolling, stretching, restlessness, reduced appetite, or signs of **abdominal pain**. If sweating is present, has an unusual posture, seems depressed, or repeatedly lies down and gets up, veterinary advice matters.

Take colic with urgency even if the signs seem minor at first. Some horses display only slight changes, such as reduced interest in feed or changed droppings. Do not wait for the problem to become severe.

Ensure the horse has **plenty of water** while you await instructions, unless instructed otherwise by the vet tells you otherwise. Check whether the horse has eaten recently, whether any new feed was introduced, and whether there has been a recent change in turnout, exercise, or routine. This information can help the vet understand the likely cause.

If you believe feed is the cause, stop any recent change and keep the horse relaxed. Do not give random supplements or human medications. The best approach is to obtain professional help immediately and give clear, factual information about the horse's recent feeding and management.

FAQ: common questions about horse feed and colic

Can horse feed cause colic in horses?

Absolutely. Horse feed can cause colic if it is too high in starch or sugar, introduced abruptly, fed in heavy servings, or not aligned with the horse's digestive needs. A balanced, forage-led ration is usually the most reliable option for promoting gut health and lowering risk.

What type of horse feed is least likely to upset digestion?

Forage-led diets are generally least likely to upset digestion. Grass hay and appropriate haylage promote fibre consumption and contribute to keep a stable hindgut environment. If concentrates are needed, select feeds with good digestibility and bring in them gradually.

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How soon should I switch a horse's feed?

Changes in feed should be slow, usually across a number of days or longer depending on the horse and the magnitude of the change. Sudden changes can disrupt the digestive system and increase the risk of colic. Slow transition is one of the most important horse feeding rules.

What warning signs should you watch for that feed may be causing colic?

Warning symptoms can involve colic-related symptoms such as belly pain, loss of appetite, changes in droppings, gas buildup, unease after feeding, or uneasiness after switching feed. If any of these occur, stop the new feed, review water intake, and consult a vet if needed.

How much does horse feed cost and does price affect quality?

Horse feed price fluctuates greatly, and price point does not always reflect suitability. Higher-priced feed is not always superior, and less expensive feed is not always poor value. The most important factors are balanced nutrients, digestibility, and whether the feed fits the horse's needs and feeding routine.