
Grand Meadows Cares Series: Spring Grass Will Soon Be Here – It's Time To Spring Into Action

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Spring is just around the corner and with it hopefully comes the luscious bright green grass that our Equus love to graze in their pastures. Now is the perfect time to get ahead of the game in regard to equine metabolic issues. We all know that when it comes to medical concerns, preventative care is better than remedial treatments.

Enjoy this straightforward 'to do' list and spring into action now. In this way you can protect your beloved equine partner from suffering the consequences of equine metabolic disturbances, and also decrease the risk of experiencing a metabolic flare up in horses that are prone to metabolic disease.

The Horse Hay Belly and Winter Overfeeding

It's human nature to want to feed animals more food than usual during blasts of cold weather in an effort to help sustain them. As the digestive process in a horse produces helpful heat energy benefits when they ingest forage such as hay, this caregiving extra ration can result in winter overfeeding. Usually this reveals itself as a horse 'hay belly', where the winter blanket unveiling may make your gelding appear like a pregnant mare late in her gestation period. Replacing the blanket to cover it up obviously does not solve the overweight horse issue.

Exercise options for riding, longing and driving our horses and the availability of suitable spaces for them to

exercise themselves are often limited during winter months. Horses may not have the opportunity to move properly due to snow or ice cover, mud mayhem or smaller overwintering paddocks close to the barn. Enforced periods of equine inactivity cannot be helped in many cases, but as Spring approaches enacting a strict exercise protocol that increases daily energy output in the Equus can be a boon to the animal losing unwanted weight.

Hand-walking or free longe work or work in hand on the line is easy to accomplish in a confined space. When you consider that in days gone by dressage trainers have successfully 'dressed' their dressage horses from start to finished Grand Prix horses using just a 20-meter circle, it's hard to argue the case for not having enough room to work your horse. Even an animal that is no longer rideable, can benefit from regular walks. Not to mention the horse handler here,

who likely will also benefit from the physical activity.

Add Bloodwork To The Spring Shot Schedule

An up-to-date metabolic panel of bloodwork is a great way to ensure you are starting off the season on the right hoof. A winter hiatus from work under saddle, a change in forage and feed provided at a livery barn, a swap in hay supplier etc. can all result in unexpected changes in the equine's metabolic health.

It's likely your vet is scheduled to visit the barn and administer Spring vaccines, complete Coggins forms and perform dental checks. While adding a metabolic work-up to the list will cost you now, it can save you much heartache and expense later.

For horses already on the radar for risk of metabolic disturbance issues, and for those that have already exhibited the assorted diseases (Equine Metabolic Syndrome, Insulin Dysregulation or Pituitary Pars Intermedia Dysfunction, Laminitis, Founder), an updated blood panel and veterinary examination is essential.

Foot The Bill

An imperative aspect of horse care as we know is hoof care. Have your farrier examine and trim/shoe your horse as appropriate to help defray any chance of hoof vulnerability to damage from long toes and heels, that may predispose the horse to foot soreness and bruising.

Foot the bill now to start your horse off on the best possible track as you begin increasing his exercise level.

Optimize Your Horse's Gut Health

Review your regimen for equine feeding and forage needs. Grass in pastures can be tested for nutritional content the same way that hay supplies can be tested. Mail-in options are available where you can send in samples throughout the grass growing season if necessary. Review results with your vet to compose a balanced diet that services each individual horse's needs.

Make sure you are not guilty of overfeeding grain or feed supplements. Remember that over-supplementation of horse feed supplements is commonplace. Are you guilty of not just wasting your money, but causing your horse a metabolic health concern or gut microbiome imbalance that is putting him at risk for other health issues including metabolic disturbances?

The better your knowledge of what your horse is eating, the better chance you have of minimizing the likelihood that you inadvertently cause a health disturbance in your horse. The reins are in your hands. If you haven't done so already it's time to take hold.

