

Care & Feeding of Weanling Minis Little Hooves 4-H Club

Foals are usually weaned and separated from their mothers at 4-6 months of age. Some people like to wean gradually while others do it "cold turkey" but either way will be stressful. At On Target Miniatures, we do it "cold turkey", removing the foals from the mothers and separating them as far away as possible for at least a few weeks. Typical reactions are screaming, running the fence line, and trying to jump anything in the way, such as fences or stall doors. We watch both mares and foals very closely for the first few hours or until they calm down a bit. To help prevent ulcers (common at times of stress) we gave each foal a dose of Gastrogard for the first few days.

The mares grain is stopped at weaning to help their udders dry up. In place of grain, the mares are fed soaked alfalfa cubes (easy on the stomach) with some beet pulp and U-Guard (a powdered ulcer preventive high in calcium). They are not fooled, but eat it! Udders are monitored closely, by sight only, and by the second day may seem about to explode, but should decrease rapidly over the next several days. If an udder does not decrease greatly in size the first week, it could be a sign of mastitis and may require treatment.

Care and Feeding weanlings:

All the foals at On Target Miniatures are handled from birth, haltered, and led, clipped, hooves trimmed, de-wormed monthly, etc. before weaning. "Training" of weanlings should be limited in time and nothing should be done that will stress their developing legs or their minds. Short walks, leading over obstacles such as tarps or poles, backing, and getting used to strange things such as umbrellas, should be about the extent of their training at this time. No longing (or any work in tight circles) or jumping should be done until they are much older or it could cause lasting damage to their legs.

Up until this point the foals had been getting a lot of nourishment from the mare's milk, which they no longer have access to, but have also been getting the same grain as the mothers. Weanlings are growing rapidly and need lots of protein in their diets in order to grow properly. Equine nutritionists recommend that 14-16% of the TOTAL diet for weanlings should be protein. Pot bellies on youngsters are often a sign of too little protein. The first step in creating a diet is to determine the weight of your mini, usually with a tape measure and chart, unless you have a scale. Measure the mini around the girth, just behind the elbow and withers, and also the length from point of shoulder to point of buttock in a straight line. Charts at this link will show you how to estimate the weight from these measures: <http://www.lilbeginnings.com/info/misc/>. Most grain bags have ranges of grain amounts per hundred pounds of body weight (or similar) based on nutritional needs. You will probably notice that the amount for weanlings is the highest of any category, often 1.5 - 2 pounds of grain per 100 pounds of body weight. A just-weaned mini might weigh 100-150 pounds so this means 1.5 -3 pounds of grain a day. But that still might not be enough to make the total diet 14-16% protein, when grass hay is about 10% protein and alfalfa hay can vary from 12-25% protein. The recommended amount of hay in the diet is usually 1-2% of body weight, and yes this does require math to figure out the amounts to feed. Hay - especially alfalfa or mixed grass and alfalfa - should be tested to determine the percentage of protein.

Example for actual 2012 weanling at On Target Miniatures (OTM)

Snappy is tiny, only 25.5" tall, her girth =33" and length=28"

Using the table, 33" girth = 109 lb

Using formula of girth X girth X length /300= wt in pounds (#): $33 \times 33 \times 28 / 300 = 101.6 \#$

These estimates are fairly close, which is good, so a weight of 100 pounds was used for calculations.

Starting with 1# hay (1% of her body weight) at 10% protein, and with 2# (from feed bag suggestion for 100 pound horse) of 14% grain, ideally a "Junior" feed designed for young horses:

$1\# \times 0.1 + 2\# \times 0.14 / 3\#$ (total weight) = $0.38/3$ or 12.7% protein.

This is below the recommended 14-16%, so diet needs more protein. One way to do this is to add Calf Manna to the diet (yes, it isn't just for calves but fine for foals!) which is 25% protein.

Adding 0.25 # of Calf Manna per day:

$0.38 + 0.0625$ ($0.25\# \times 0.25$) = 0.4425 divided by new total weight of $3.25 \#$ = 13.6% protein.

This is still not quite enough, so add 0.5 # Calf Manna and reduce 14% grain to 1.5#:

$1\# \times 0.1 + 1.5\# \times 0.14 + 0.5\# \times 0.25 = 0.1 + 0.21 + 0.125 = .435/3 = 14.5\%$ protein!!!

So 1 # hay, 1.5# of 14% protein grain and 0.5 # Calf Manna looks like a good daily ration for Snappy, which is split into several feedings. **Always make feed changes gradually**, so work up to these amounts over a week or more. Hay and grain should be weighed, at least to determine how much a unit measure of the grain or hay weighs, in order to assure that feed amounts are accurate. At OTM a 10 # white Strongid container is used to measure hay, as it will hold 1 # of our grass hay when tightly packed. A one cup household dry measuring cup is used for grain, and holds different weights, depending on the grain.

These same weights of hay, 14% grain and 25% Calf Manna can be adjusted up or down for other body weights. For example, a 150# weanling would get 1.5# hay, 2.25# of the 14% grain and 0.75# Calf Manna for 1.5# of hay total and 3# of grain. And of course these amounts need to be increased as the foal gains weight. Condition should also be monitored and amounts adjusted as needed. This is especially critical that first winter, when you must feel through the heavy coat along the back, hips and ribs to determine condition. These weights of hay and grain also work out to be close to the suggested ratio of grain to hay for weanlings of 70:30. Note that recommended grain to hay ratios, feed amounts, and percentage of total protein in the diet all change as the foal ages, so diets for yearlings and older minis will be different.

There are plenty of other ways to get to this end result of 14-16% total protein in the weanling diet and a 70:30 ratio of grain to hay, but this is just one example. The condition of the animal is the final determinant of what and how much to feed. Some will be "easy keepers" and gain weight on a diet that will not be adequate for a "hard keeper" of the same weight. Because "sweet feeds" are high in sugar which can contribute to the formation of ulcers, they should be avoided for weanlings.