



CHAFFEE COUNTY EXTENSION

3 Pillars of Equine Health

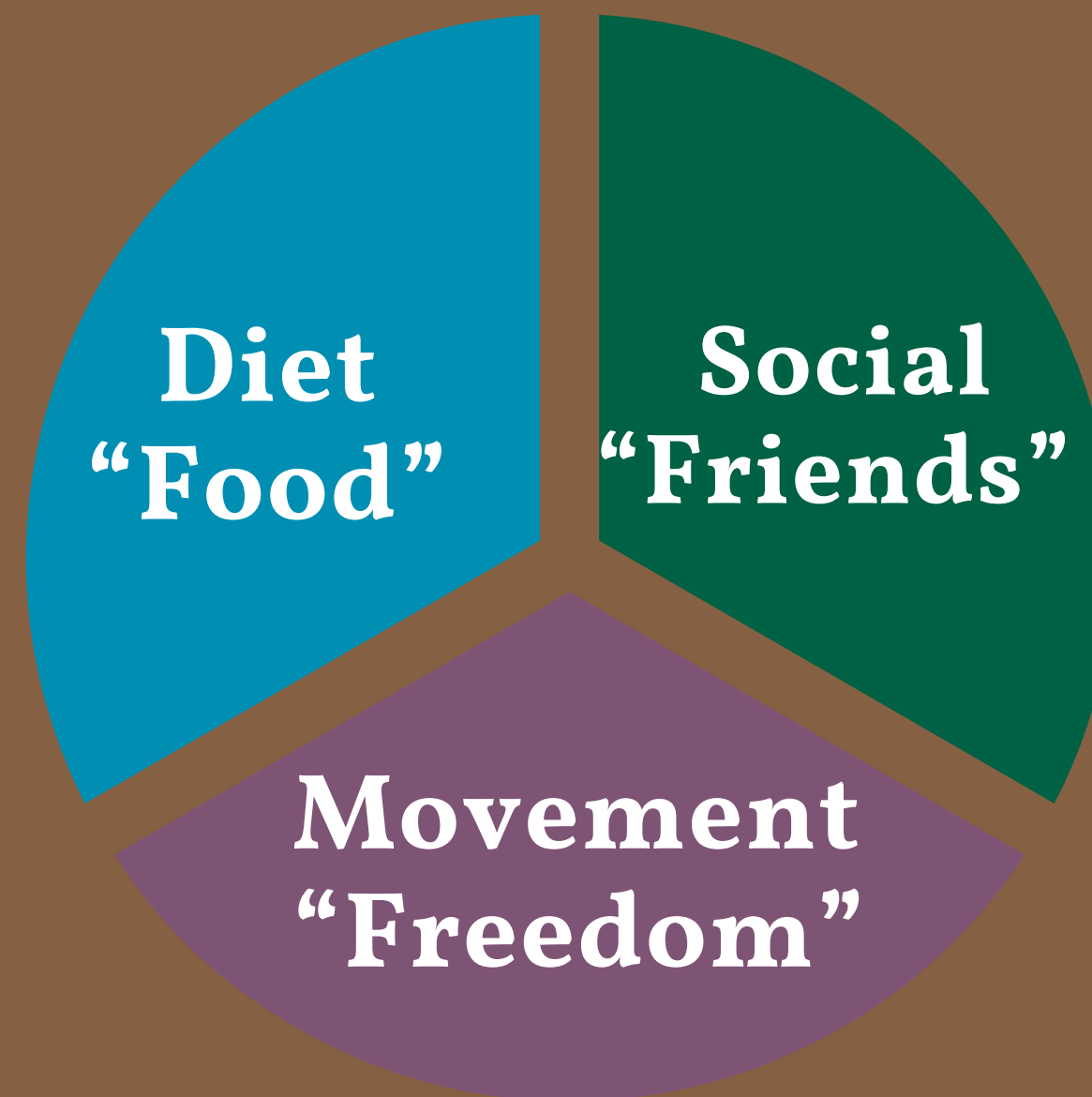
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What are the 3 pillars?



Equine health is critical for 4-H members!



Healthy Horse = Fun Horses!

When a horse feels good, they are more likely to give us the behaviors we desire (correct behavior under saddle, proper ground manners, etc.)

Healthy Horse = Less Emergencies

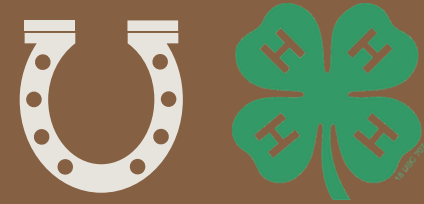
Remember, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! Keeping horses healthy is often cheaper than rehabbing a sick, lame, or underweight horse.

Health Horse = Good Stewardship

Caring for and managing the horse is a critical piece of the 4-H project. We want 4-H'ers to learn equine skills on the ground, in the saddle, and in the barn.

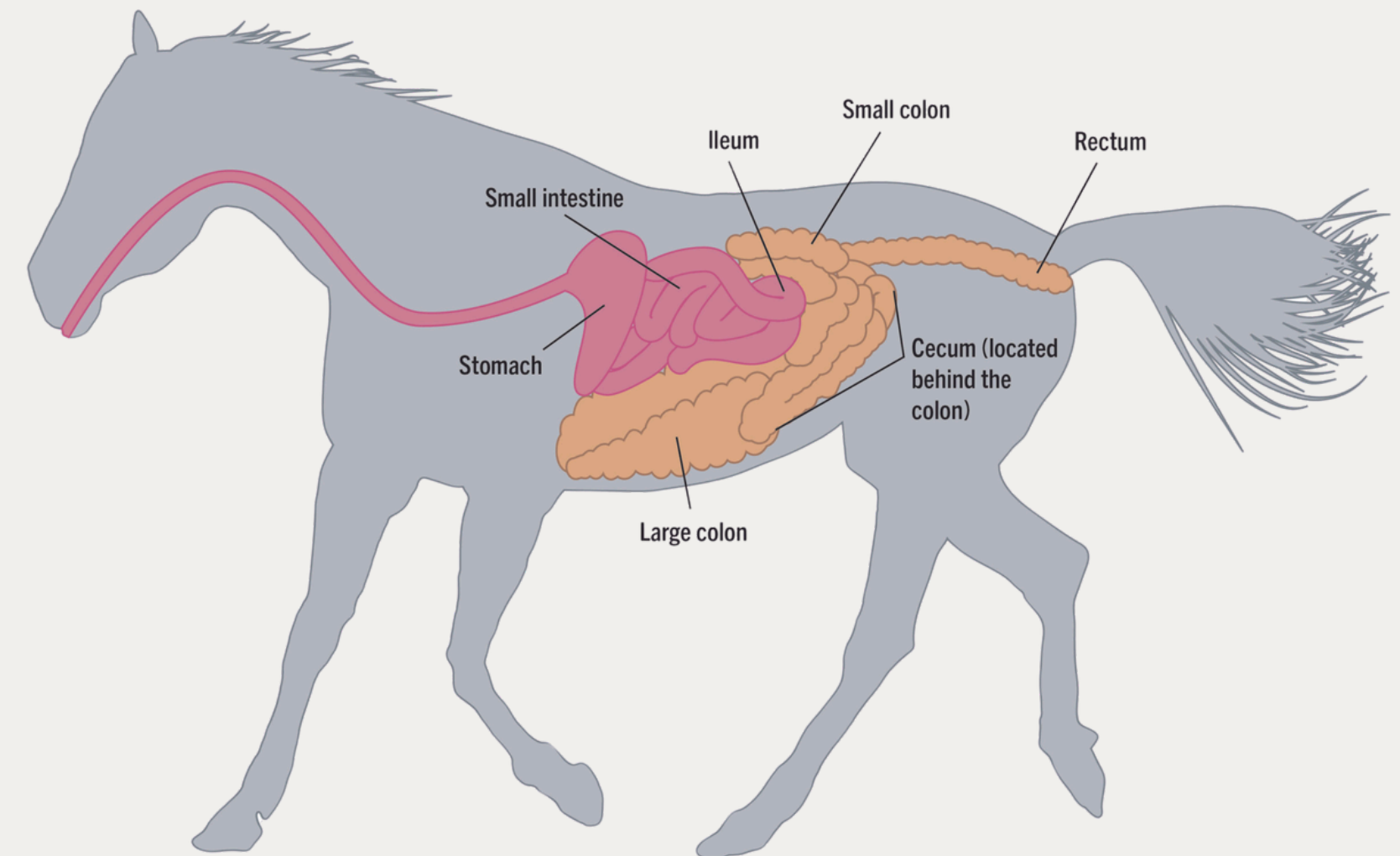
Pillar I

DIET / FOOD



Complicated GI system

- Horses have a single stomach, unlike ruminants (sheep, cows, etc.)
- The stomach can hold a max of 4-5 gallons.
- The entire GI system takes 3-4 days to empty.
- Horses have over 100 feet of intestines.





When feeding, consider the horse's:

- Age (geriatric horses require more/different feed)
- Breed
 - Typically harder keepers: Thoroughbreds, Arabians, hot-blooded types
 - Typically easier keepers: stock types, drafts, draft crosses, many pony breeds
- Size (height & weight)
- Activity level/workload
- Stage of growth (young horses or broodmares require different feed programs)
- Other medical history (history of choke? teeth issues? Insulin resistance?)



6 TYPES OF NUTRIENTS

1

Water

Clean, 10-15 gallons/day
& heated in winter

2

Fiber/Carbs

Main source of fuel.
Bulk of diet.

3

Fats

Source of energy. Very
easily digestible.

4

Proteins

Tissue, hoof, coat, etc.
Measured by Crude
Protein (CP)

5

Vitamins

Fat or water soluble
Good quality forage
should have vitamins

6

Minerals

Macro & micro
Block or loose format





Forage First!

- The horse is meant to graze up to 18 hours a day.
- Lots of little meals is better than one or two large meals.
- Having roughage available for most of the day can reduce the risk of issues such as:
 - Colic
 - Gastric ulcers
 - Loss of condition
 - Boredom
- Forage **SHOULD** have:
 - A high leaf-to-stem ratio
 - Fine/small stems
 - Fresh smell & appearance
 - Good color
- Forage should **NEVER** have:
 - Mold
 - Moisture
 - Weeds
 - Signs of pests (insects, possum poop, etc.)

Remember, tossing out a bale or two of bad hay is cheaper than a vet bill!





How much to feed?

- Use a simple percentage of body weight as a starting point.
- Calculate body weight using a weight tape or string method.

1.5% of body weight
to lose condition

2% of body weight
to maintain condition

2.5% or more
to gain condition

- Horses should never be fed less than 1.5% of their body weight.

Extend foraging time

- Many easy-keeper horses cannot have free forage access.
- Consider using hay nets or other slow-feeder methods to extend foraging time without increasing forage ration.



Supplement if Needed

- Many horses do very well on grass hay alone or a grass/alfalfa hay mix. Keep in mind alfalfa is a richer hay than grass, higher in protein.
- If a horse has a medical history (TMJ issues, dental issues, choke history, etc.), additional feeds may be necessary:
 - Soaked hay pellets/cubes
 - Complete feeds
 - Cereal grains (corn, oats, barley, etc.)
- Supplements
 - Ration balancers
 - Gastric support
 - Hormone support
 - Joint support
- Added calories
 - Rice bran
 - Oils



Remember to read feed tags & consult your vet!



WHERE TO FIND QUALITY FEED?

Contact your local Extension office, feed stores, hay producers, veterinarians, and equine nutritionists for leads on finding and securing quality feed.

Pillar 2

MOVEMENT / FREEDOM



Moving Horses = Healthy Horses

- Movement is an essential part of a healthy horse. Horses in wild environments, such as the American Mustang or Australian Brumby, often travel 15 miles a day in search of water, food, shelter, and minerals.
- Digestive track is *designed* for movement!
- Domesticated horses do not move nearly as much as their bodies are meant to.
- How can we incorporate more movement into our horse's daily lives?



Riding

- Of course, most people want to ride their horses!
- Begin each ride with a 5-10 minute walking warm-up. This period helps the synovial joint fluid lubricate the joints and reduces the risk of injury.
- Correct, balanced riding reduces the risk of injury, build strength, and contributes to a long, happy life for your horse.
- Horses must build fitness just like people. Asking too much too soon can reduce a horse's willingness to "try."



*“First, you go with the horse.
Then, the horse goes with you.
Then, you can go together.”*

Tom Dorrance

Is it too hot/cold to ride?

- Horses are typically the most comfortable around 40 degrees. That contributes to their frisky behavior on cool mornings!
- Usually the rider gets cold before the horse does. Must ensure proper warm up and cool down period in cold temps to avoid sweating and catching a chill.
- Footing can be a big concern in the winter. Ice = don't ride!
- A 5-10 minute warmup is a great way to reduce risk of injury when riding in any weather.



To blanket or not to blanket?

- Which horses may need to be blanketed?
 - Show horses in year-round intense training
 - Thin-skinned, short-haired breeds (many thoroughbreds)
 - Older horses
 - Horses with health issues
 - Horses on a weight-gain plan
 - Horses that have moved from a warmer climate
- Once you begin blanketing for the year, you're committed!
- Blanket horses like you dress yourself for a hike
 - layers are important!





Other Movement Methods

- Turnout
- Round Penning
- Liberty Work
- Ground Driving
- Track Systems
 - Check out Pete Ramey, “Paddock Paradise” book
 - Designed to encourage movement by creating “tracks” within a pasture that lead to food, water, shelter, salt, etc.





Movement & Hoof Health

- Just like the digestive system, the hoof is designed for movement
- Many horses benefit from going barefoot for at least a portion of the year. Living in the Rockies, most working horses require some type of hoof protection (traditional shoes, boots, glue-on shoes, etc.)
- Hoof mechanism - the expansion and contraction of the hoof as the limb bears weight and relaxes
- Consult with your vet and farrier to design a hoof care plan that works for you and your herd.



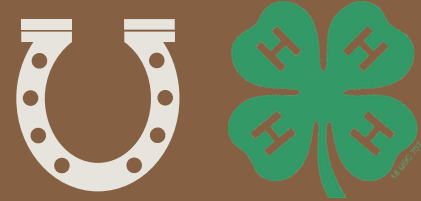
Consistency is key

Find what works for you and your horse. Give it a try for a few weeks/months and modify as needed.



Pillar 3

SOCIAL / FRIENDS



Herd Life = Happy Life

Horses are designed to be herd creatures. They take comfort in being around other equine. A horse that is alone is often stressed & depressed.

Natural Behavior = Healthy Horse

In a herd setting, horses can express their natural equine behaviors such as mutual grooming, play, napping, etc.

Supporting Healthy Social Dynamics

Group Turnout

Consider turning your horse out with horses of similar ages, sex, and personalities.

Fencing

Aggressive horses or those with challenging personalities can share fence lines or visual sight of other horses.

Hierarchies

Horses live in a hierarchy with a top/dominant horse, middle-of-the-pack horses, and “low man on the totem pole” animals.

Reducing Vices

Horses that are well-fed and live in a herd environment are less likely to develop vices such as weaving, cribbing, etc.

Supporting Social Success



Rule of 3

A herd of 3 fulfills the social needs of horses (top man on the totem pole, low man, and middle man)



Mental Enrichment

If horses must be stalled, consider mental enrichment through slow-feeder hay nets, treat toys, radio music, etc.



Understanding Excess Energy

Horses that do not expend energy in the herd through play may have excess energy the rider/handler will have to handle.

Consider also...

Parasite Management

Be aware of parasites and signs of parasite issues such as tail rubbing, incessant scratching, poor body condition, or diarrhea.

Vaccinations

Contact your vet about vaccinations needed in your area. Many areas do tetanus, influenza, WNV, EEE/WEE, and rabies.

Good Fencing

Good fencing should be solid (not sagging or loose), well-maintained, and easily seen by the horse. Use extreme caution with barbed wire.

Good Footing

Be aware of rocks, holes, old wire, or other hazards in the area where you ride/train.

Poisonous Weeds

Colorado is home to many poisonous weeds and plants. Contact your Extension office for fact sheets on these plant species.

Well-Fitting Tack

Correctly fitting saddles, bridles, bits, cinches, and quality pads help protect the horse while riding & training.

Additional Resources

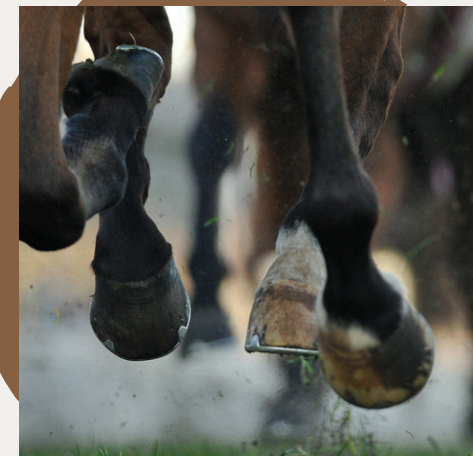
WHERE TO GO TO LEARN?



*CO 4-H Horse Show
Rule Book*



4-H Horse Manual
[https://co4h.colostate.edu/projects
/manuals/Horse.pdf](https://co4h.colostate.edu/projects/manuals/Horse.pdf)



*Horse Owner's
Veterinary Handbook*

https://www.amazon.com/Horse-Owners-Veterinary-Handbook-Gore/dp/1630260037/ref=asc_df_1630260037/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=dfo&hvadid=693309713514&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=17782296463807797622&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9029121&hvtargid=pla-569309752289&psc=1&mcid=89902d108ba93cdd887f3230148077cc&gad_source=1

Equine Health is a Team Effort!



VETERINARIANS

Always refer to your vet team if you have specific questions about your horse.



FARRIERS

Hoof health is paramount!



4-H LEADERS

Your horse 4-H leaders and volunteers are excellent resources!

A herd of horses is running across a grassy field. In the background, there are snow-capped mountains and a body of water. The sky is cloudy. The text "Questions? Comments? How can I help?" is overlaid on the image.

*Questions? Comments?
How can I help?*

Contact

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