
WEANING YOUR FOAL



A Quick Guide

What you need to know to help wean your foal

For weaning to be the least stressful, your foal should meet certain important criteria. He should be:

- At least three months of age
- Preferably between four to six months old
- In good overall health
- He should be healthy, strong
- Exhibit a good appetite and eating forage and concentrate

Whats best?

There are many different methods of weaning foals:

Weaning can be a very stressful time for the foal. But you can minimise this stress with a bit of thought and good management. The trauma of separation is emotional as well physical.

After making the decision ensure you have suitable safe and secure facilities for doing it.

Horses are herd animals, its not ideal to keep a weaned foal on its own, they need company. Old pony mares who have had a foal or two are often the best companions for single foals because they teach them manners and what is expected of them.

The quickest and least time consuming method of weaning:

Place the foal in the stable that has been made safe and secure for it and take the mare away to where she is being placed for weaning, ideally where the mare and foal cannot see or hear each other. This can be the most stressful method for the foal, but the process of weaning is over and done with quickly.

A more gradual method of weaning:

Involves placing the mare and foal in separate but adjoining paddocks, so that they can see each other, but the foal cannot drink from the mare. Gradually they will spend more and more time away from each other until the mare can be taken away to a paddock where the mare and foal cannot see or hear each other.

The most time consuming method of weaning:

Involves separating the mare and foal for only short periods of time initially, and gradually increasing the length of time the mare and foal are separated until eventually they are not reunited. It does give the foal a taste of independence before it has to do it full time, and the mare's milk will start to dry off with the reduced demand.

Don't forget about the mare:

After weaning don't forget about the mare. Most mares cope much better than their foals with the weaning process, but they must still be monitored to ensure they do not harm themselves in the immediate period after weaning.

One of the most important points to remember is to check the mare's udder for the development of mastitis. Mastitis is uncommon in mares but requires veterinary attention if it occurs.

- The udder becomes hot, swollen and painful.
- The mare may be reluctant to eat and move,
- May have a fever (temperature greater than 38.5°C).
- **Do not be tempted to strip out the mare's udder after weaning; It makes her think the foal is drinking and encourages the udder to produce more milk when you want it to dry up.**

It is best to do nothing to the udder other than monitor it for signs of mastitis. Initially the udder will enlarge after weaning but the mare should remain bright and comfortable, and the udder will begin to reduce in size again after a few days.