

# *The Growing Foetus*

As your broodmare gets closer and closer to her due date, you've been noting, with some satisfaction, her bulging belly, her increasingly matronly attitude, and the look of lazy contentment in her eyes. But while she might look relaxed on the outside, inside, her growing foal is making ever-increasing demands on her body. Those demands won't stop when she gives birth, either. As any mother will tell you, that's when the real work begins!

The early stages of pregnancy, when the fetus is the size of a walnut, aren't particularly strenuous for the average equine, but that situation begins to change radically as the mare enters her final 110 days of gestation. It's in the last trimester that the unborn foal's growth accelerates at a surprising rate--and with it, the mare's nutritional requirements. Over the course of a healthy pregnancy, a mare's weight should increase by an amount equal to the weight of the foal at birth plus the weight of the placenta and the uterine fluids--generally 9-12% of the mare's original weight. A 200 kilo mare, for example, should gain between 20 and 26 kilos during the course of her gestation, with some two-thirds of that total weight gain coming in the final three months.

In the last 110 days of her pregnancy, your broodmare's energy needs progressively will increase by 10-20%. She'll need almost twice the amount of calcium and phosphorus in her diet that she normally would require. Her need for protein also will inch up to about 1.3 times its usual level. All of these nutrients are important for the construction of a strong, healthy foal. In order to satisfy those needs, her appetite will increase.

Once she has given birth, the nutritional demands don't decrease. In fact, lactation (the process of producing milk for her offspring) will accelerate the challenges to your mare's system. Her energy needs will shoot up by a full 80%, her protein needs will more than double, and her requirement for calcium and phosphorus (both important minerals essential for the foal's correct growth) will almost triple. Nursing her foal for the first eight weeks is as strenuous an activity as your mare ever will undertake, and that time will have a lasting impact on how well her foal develops and matures. Knowing this, it's a sure bet you'll want to provide your mare with an optimum diet and all the nutritional support she needs, throughout her pregnancy and during the time she is nursing her baby, right up until weaning.