

# The Energetics Of Food

By Dr. Joyce Harman, on May 1st, 2010

## THE ENERGETICS OF FOOD, FEEDING FOR OPTIMAL HEALTH IN THE EQUINE



Chinese food energetics has become more popular in small animal medicine, but has gained little attention in the horse world. Prepackaged, processed equine feeds are just as bad as pet bagged pet foods and just as detrimental to health. Whole food material is best to feed, with attention to the actions of each food.

It is important to understand the Chinese diagnostics when deciding which food to use in an individual case.

First, is the case excess or deficient?

If excess, is it a primary excess: wind, cold, damp, heat, summer heat, dryness? Or is it secondary: stagnation, phlegm, food stasis or stone formation?

If deficiency (most common), is it a Qi, Blood, Yin or Yang deficiency?

Next, what are the nutritional and caloric needs of the horse? An obese horse does not need much in the way of supplemental food and may need food restriction, but what he does get should be carefully selected for his needs. An overly thin horse may need quite a bit of food in order to help him heal, but if he has a severe imbalance such as laminitis, that food again should be carefully selected. Treats are also an important part of most clients feeding program and need to be addressed also. Simple management issues also have to be considered, such as how many teeth are left to chew with, how easily can the clients fence off excess pasture, how hard does the horse work and how much stress is that horse experiencing.

Apply the principles of the Chinese body and personality type to lead you to the correct foods. The Earth horse is the perfect school horse, quiet, sweet, easy to handle, friendly, likes food and tends to gain weight or be deficient in his Spleen. The Fire horse is the typical happy chestnut thoroughbred mare, bouncing off the walls, very sensitive, friendly, and is likely to have skin problems or mental imbalances. The Wood horse is the workaholic, driven racehorse or performance horse, does not like to be confined, and is prone to ulcers and anger issues. The Metal horse is obedient, does not like to be fussed over, will do his job well and is prone to respiratory and skin problems. The Water horse is flexible in his body, fearful in his brain and prone to mental issues (the kidney and bladder imbalances do not occur frequently in horses).

The season of the year also helps determine the feeds to select. In the hot summer time, a warming food such as oats may adversely affect the Fire horse, even if oats can be tolerated in the winter. Conversely a cool food such as barley may not work well for an older arthritic horse in the winter.

Foods have those same basic properties as Chinese herbs. They have a temperature, a flavor, a direction and a meridian they mainly influence. The basic principle of Yin and Yang apply to foods; a balance between the two is essential. Yin foods are cooling, salty, bitter, and sour, have descending energy and build body fluids and blood. Yang foods are warming, sweet, pungent, energizing and have ascending energy. Yin conditions are cold, interior and deficient, while Yang conditions are hot, exterior and excess.

Processed foods are pushed to the horse owning public, even as it is recognized that horses actually need very little grain concentrates. The feed companies do not want to give up their sales, so they create foods made of inedible byproducts placed in a bag and sold for all sorts of specialized conditions. Processing of all sorts increases the warmth of a food. The higher the heat used to cook it, the warmer the food. Pellets and extruded feeds are all heat processed. Flash cooked oats are heat processed, though for a shorter time than the extruded foods, Hulless oats have been grown without the natural fiber that an oat contains so will be digested faster and warmer. Processed foods should never be fed to horses with warm or hot conditions.

Drugs can affect the energetic patterns, so foods can be selected to offset the reaction of the body to the drug. For example, steroids damage the Yin, leading to a Yin deficiency and therefore a deficiency heat (lack of Yin to cool the Yang). Cooling foods can be used to offset the heat. Phenylbutazone can damage the Stomach and Liver, leading to heat in the liver and intestinal tract, so again some cooling foods can help offset the drug condition.

### **Foods for various conditions**

These conditions below are sample ideas, since each individual horse may have a different presentation than is usually seen. In cases where both warm and cool are common, the condition is listed in both. For example, ulcers are often from excess heat in the Liver overacting on the Stomach, but could be from a Stomach Yin deficiency. Fortunately, cooling foods could be used for both conditions here without any problems. Laminitis is a heat condition, but can be from an excess or deficiency. Many horses are put on starvation diets and become very thin. However they need to eat, and often need quite a bit of protein or calories to heal, but need to eat cooling foods. Arthritis is usually a cold disease, but a Yin deficient horse may have a warm arthritis where warming foods are contraindicated. A yang deficient laminitis horse will thrive with cinnamon added, while a yin deficient or excess heat laminitis will worsen when fed cinnamon. Ginger is well known for its positive effects on the stomach and this author uses it frequently for motion sickness, but it is warming, so it could aggravate ulcers if they are caused by excess heat.

Horse feeds tend to have only a few ingredients, however, in various parts of the world many different foods are actually fed to horses. It is possible to try some of the vegetables listed to see if a horse likes to eat them, they are not harmful. In parts of the world where horses commonly eat different foods, they learn from a young age to like that food. For example, in England's root crop growing

areas, it is common to see oversized parsnips dumped in a field for the horses to graze on. In the USA, the author has seen random selections of vegetables and fruits from the discards at grocery stores fed to happy, healthy horses. This is an excellent way to add variety to a diet.

### **Hot, warm diseases**

Ulcers, laminitis, uveitis, inflammatory diarrhea, hepatitis, urinary tract inflammation, pituitary hyperplasia (some), Insulin resistance (some), Yin deficient arthritis, inflamed skin, itchy skin, atopy, colic (some), uterine infections, anhydrosis.

Foods: alfalfa, amaranth, asparagus, barley bran, barley grass, barley, broccoli, buckwheat, cantaloupe, cauliflower, celery, citrus, cucumber, egg plant, eggplant, flax seed (oil), grass, lettuce, millet, pear, peppermint, persimmon, radish, soy bean oil, spinach, strawberry, summer squash, sweet corn, tomato, watermelon rim, watermelon, wheat bran, wheat grass, wheat, zucchini.

### **Cold, cool diseases**

Arthritis, many diarrheas, pituitary hyperplasia (most), insulin resistance (many), hypothyroid, colic (many), male infertility, hyperadrenocorticism-hirsutism,

Foods: apricot, banana, cherry, cinnamon, coriander, fennel, garlic, ginger, ginger, horseradish, kale, kelp, leek, lettuce, maltose, mustard greens, oats, olive oil, parsley, parsnip, peach, pumpkin, quinoa, seaweed, sesame seed, spelt, squash, sunflower seeds (may not be as good with the shells), sweet feed, tangerine peel, turmeric, winter squash.

Neutral foods that could be used in many conditions:

apple, apricot, beet pulp, buckwheat, cabbage, carrots, Chinese cabbage, corn, fig, grape, papaya, peanut hay, peanut oil, radish, rice, rye, sweet potato.

Food therapy can be used to enhance the healing process for many equine conditions. Broaden your horizons by looking past the traditional foods and encourage the clients to experiment and add variety to the diet.

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