

Are You Ready to Wean Your Foals?

Early autumn is a time when horse owners are frequently preparing to wean foals from their dams. Proper preparation makes the process much easier.



“Tanner” and “Parker” spend time in the pasture.
High quality forage should be made available to the growing foal, prior to weaning.
And remember “Misery loves company,” at weaning time.

Christie Truemper photograph

There are several management practices that should be in place before the foal is weaned:

- Make certain that the foal is consuming at least one pound, per month of age, of a feed designed for foals and weanlings. (Ex: If a foal is 4 months of age, it should be consuming at least 4 pounds of feed per day.) Keep in mind that beyond two months of age, the dam’s milk is not sufficient to maintain adequate growth. The foal should also have access to high quality forage, loose salt and fresh, clean water.
- Ensure the foal has been vaccinated for appropriate diseases according to its health care plan. Vaccination is stressful for the animal, so we do not want to do this at the same time we wean the foal.
- The foal should also be de-wormed prior to weaning.
- The foal should have been handled (imprint training is a great tool), taught to lead, and have had its feet trimmed.
- Weaning can be a high stress period for the foal. With that in mind, other high stress events should be avoided during weaning. For example, the day you wean the foal is *not* the day to change feeds.

There are a number of different ways to handle weaning, depending on the number of foals and the layout of the facility. There are several factors to keep in mind:

- There is probably less stress on the foal if it remains in the pen or paddock to which it is accustomed, instead of being moved to a new location.
- “Misery loves company.” If you have more than one foal, wean at least two at a time and keep them together. If you have only one foal, perhaps you have a nice old gelding who can be a babysitter?
- Make certain the pen and paddock are safe with good fencing and no hazards.
- Out of sight (and earshot) means out of mind. Mares and their foals tend to calm down faster if they cannot see and hear each other after weaning.
- A few days prior to weaning, reduce the mare’s grain intake to prepare her to dry up from milk production. Her udder is going to be somewhat swollen, so don’t plan on cinching her up right away for a trail ride.

Monitor the new weanlings closely and increase feed intake to maintain growth and body condition. Because a weanling cannot digest forage as efficiently as an older horse, some weanlings can become a bit pot-bellied and look a little rough following weaning, from inadequate feed intake and too much forage.

Proper preparation can minimize weaning stress for foals and broodmares and make for a more pleasant autumn for the horse owner, too.