and equine nutritionist to develop an individualized weaning plan for your foal. Successfully with advance planning, good nutrition, and close observation. Work with your veterinarian conducting research in this area, and more research could help us have much healthier weanlings.

"The horse world is behind other species such as cattle and swine in suppressing immune function. Researchers have found increased cortisol (the stress hormone) levels during this time." Thus, she says, additional investigations into weaning's effect on immune response, weaning process, are immunosuppressed, which likely renders them more susceptible to disease.

"There are two components of the immune response that can be affected during weaning. One is significantly decreased cytokine gene expression and production, both in vivo (in the live horse) and in vitro (in samples examined in a lab setting). "These findings indicate that young foals, during the first four to six weeks of weaning, have a suppressed immune system response during and after weaning.

When and How to Wean

Adams notes that many scientists believe stressful events such as weaning activate the hypothalamus-adrenal axis, resulting in the release of hormones that likely play a role in immune function, and this is likely the case if foals are weaned too early. "We need to do further research to determine ways that we can minimize the decreased immune function, and immune function, and this is likely the case if foals are weaned too early," Adams says. "We had Draft horse weanlings that were weaned at four months of age and did not do as well as those weaned at six months."

Adams says scientists believe cortisol contributes to a suppressed immune system response during and after weaning. Weaned foals secreted lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol in their saliva over the first four days with foals exhibiting less vocalization and aggression and better social cohesion. In addition, the adult male mare and the foal are more likely to bond and this will help the foal as he grows and develops.

Adams underscores the importance of introducing the new diet slowly, starting with the good and handling. "Before you wean, be sure that you have introduced foals to the new diet they will be weaned on," she says. "Weaning helps introduce this new diet without the foal having to compete with the mare. "In fact, creep feeding helps the foal gain weight and muscle, and the mare's milk may not provide as much energy as the foal needs."

Adams says the weaning process should be planned for a month or so. When and how the process is conducted depends on the individual foal, and the weaning age can be as early as four months or as late as six months. She says weaning before four months can be risky because an infection can quickly spread through the whole herd.

Foals should be allowed the freedom to run and play, which is an important part of their development. "Weanlings thrive on as much turnout as possible. "Don't keep them in a stall all the time because an infection can quickly spread through the whole herd."

"When weanlings are weaned, we start to see issues such as lameness, poor development, and musculoskeletal issues. Weanlings try to follow biosecurity and safety rules so that they do not bring anything new to your farm." Adams notes that many scientists believe stressful events such as weaning activate the hypothalamus-adrenal axis, resulting in the release of hormones that likely play a role in immune function, and this is likely the case if foals are weaned too early.

She emphasizes the importance of nutrition. "The bottom line with nutrition, says Ralston, is to reach a happy medium. "You don't want the foals to be too fat or too thin," she says. "You don't want to see their ribs, but you do want to be able to feel them. If they are getting adequate nutrition their coats will have a natural shine to them, and they should look healthy."

"Feeding Weanlings"

"The real danger is overfeeding energy, especially carbohydrates, with inadequate mineral intake." Ralston says. "Too much energy promotes rapid development at a time when foals are already growing like weeds. The real danger is overfeeding energy, especially carbohydrates, with inadequate mineral intake." Ralston says. "Too much energy promotes rapid development at a time when foals are already growing like weeds, and growing ¾ to 1 inch in height every week or two," Ralston says. "If their nutrition is imbalanced (particularly from 4 to 6 months old). "We had Draft horse weanlings that were weaned at four months of age and did not do as well as those weaned at six months."

"Inflammation," poor bone growth, and flexural deformities will show up and progress very quickly. So if feeding the weanlings, be careful of how much energy you are providing and how much protein you are providing, and make sure that the protein is of high biological quality.

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