

If you want a **low sugar horse feed** and/or **low starch horse feed**, the smartest starting point is clear: pick a feed built around **fibre** and **forage**, with minimal levels of **sugar**, **starch**, and other **non-structural carbohydrates**. Practically speaking, that usually means feeds such as **unmolassed chaff**, **beet pulp**, a well-chosen **feed balancer**, or a **complete horse feed** created for low starch intake. The right choice depends on your horse's **body condition score**, **work level**, and whether you are managing **laminitis**, excitability, poor weight gain, or an easy-keeping type.

The fastest way to decide is to look for a feed with modest **digestible energy**, a high fibre base, and a clear **nutritional analysis**. A feed can still be suitable even if it is not "grain-free", so long as the levels of starch and sugar are low enough for the horse's needs. The aim is not to remove all carbohydrates, but to choose a diet that promotes the **digestive system**, improves **gut health**, and gives **slow release energy** without triggering a high **glycaemic response** or **starch overload**.

What counts as low sugar and low starch horse feed?

In horse nutrition, a **horse feed** is generally considered low sugar and low starch when it keeps the combined levels of **sugar** and **clinical EMS feed starch** low enough to suit horses that need a controlled diet. These carbohydrates are often called **non-structural carbohydrates**, or NSCs. They are the more rapidly digested part of the ration and can have a greater effect on the **glycaemic response** than fibre-rich ingredients.

Low sugar and low starch feeding is especially relevant for horses with **laminitis**, those prone to weight gain, and those that become sharp on richer feeds. A good low-risk feed usually has:

- elevated **fibre** content
- moderate to low **digestible energy**
- minimal cereal content
- no molasses added, or only minimal amounts
- a careful balance of **protein, vitamins and minerals**, and fat

Forage remains the base of the ration. Good quality **hay** or **haylage** can be part of a low sugar plan, but the actual nutrient profile matters. Some hay is naturally higher in sugar than people expect, so forage-based feeding is not just about quantity; it is also about quality and suitability. A low sugar horse feed should work alongside the forage rather than work against it.

Think of low sugar feeding as a feeding strategy, not just a product label. The whole ration matters: forage, feed, turnout, and workload all influence how a horse responds.

Which kinds of horse feed work best for a low-sugar and starch?

There are a number of **types of horse feed** that can suit well in a low sugar diet, but some are more practical than others depending on the horse's condition and workload. If your priority is keeping sugar and starch low, these are the most sensible options.

Unmolassed chaff and fibre-based feeds

Chaff is one of the easiest reduced sugar options to use because it adds chew time and fibre without loading the ration with starch. The best version is usually **unmolassed** chaff. It can be fed alone with a balancer or used to

carry other ingredients such as chopped forage, beet pulp, or oil. Fibre-based mixes support gut motility and can help maintain a steadier temperament.

Beet pulp and soaked fibre feeds

Beet pulp is a well-liked ingredient in reduced sugar diets because it provides digestible fibre rather than cereal starch. It is commonly used soaked as part of a mash or bucket feed. Although it can contribute useful calories, it is usually gentler than cereal-based feeds and often suits horses needing condition without excess starch.

Feed balancer and ration balancer products

A **feed balancer** is a concentrated source of **vitamins and minerals**, plus amino acids and sometimes protein, designed to top up a forage-based diet. It is ideal for horses that do not need much extra energy but still require nutritional support. Balancers are often a practical choice for native breeds, good-doers, and horses on restricted rations. They can also pair well with chaff and forage cubes for a simple reduced sugar feeding plan.

Complete horse feed options

A **complete horse feed** can be suitable if it is formulated as a low **starch**, low sugar product. Complete feeds usually include fibre, some oil, and a balanced vitamin and mineral package so they can be fed as a sole bucket feed. This can be useful for horses that need a simple ration and where weighing and supplementing separately is not practical. Always check the **nutritional analysis**, because “complete” does not automatically mean low sugar.

Refreshingly low-temperature feed and weight-supporting feed choices

Some products are marketed as **cooling feed** or **conditioning feed**. A cooling feed is often reduced in starch and formulated to provide regulated energy, making it useful for overly lively horses. A conditioning feed may provide more calories, often through **oil** and fibre, to help horses gain weight. If you need extra condition, look for one that raises calories mainly through roughage and oil rather than starch.

Among the many **horse feed companies**, there are often comparable low starch options. For example, **spillers horse feed** includes products aimed at fibre-based, controlled-energy feeding. The brand matters less than the ingredients, analysis, and suitability for the individual horse.

How to choose horse feed for laminitis-prone, excitable, or easy-keeping horses

Reliable **horse feed advice** [uk](#) [overweight horse feed](#) should always begin with the horse, not the bag. Horses with **laminitis** risk, excitability, or a tendency to gain weight often do best on a forage-led ration with controlled calories and low non-structural carbohydrates. The right feed depends on the job the horse is doing, but also on how efficiently that horse holds condition.

Use this practical framework:

- **Laminitis-prone horses:** go for very low sugar and low starch feeds, avoid cereal-heavy products, and keep the ration fibre-based.
- **Sensitive horses:** prioritise steady, digestible fibre and avoid sudden changes that can upset the digestive system.
- **Easy-keeping horses:** use a balancer, unmolassed chaff, and limited hard feed if forage alone is sufficient.

- **Excitable horses:** choose a cooling feed with low starch and controlled energy from fibre and oil.

It also helps to assess **weight management** through regular body scoring. A horse with a healthy **body condition score** may need only forage plus a balancer, while a thin horse may need extra calories from a better-suited low starch feed. The aim is to match intake to need without pushing starch higher than necessary.

For horses that need more energy for work but still require a low starch diet, seek slow-burning calories from fibre and **oil**. This approach supports **slow release energy** without the sharper rises associated with cereal-based feeds. It is also kinder to the **digestive system** in many cases.

Decoding the label: sweetness, carbohydrate, DE, and roughage

Reviewing a feed label accurately is one of the most valuable skills you can have. The **nutritional analysis** tells you whether a product is really appropriate or just presented that way. Watch carefully to the values for sugar, starch, and **digestible energy** (often shown as DE).

These are the key points:

- **Sugar:** lower is generally better for laminitis-prone or weight-sensitive horses.
- **Starch:** lower levels help reduce the risk of starch overload and can support a calmer temperament.
- **Digestible energy:** indicates how much usable energy the feed provides.
- **Fibre:** greater amounts often suggest a more forage-friendly feed.

The **ingredients list** is just as important as the analysis. Ingredients are listed in order of inclusion, so cereals near the top often indicate more starch. Look for chopped forage, beet pulp, grass products, soya hulls, and added oil. A feed with a strong fibre base and limited cereals is usually better for low sugar feeding.

Be cautious with claims such as “natural” or “low molasses” unless the numbers support them. An **unmolassed** feed is often a better starting point than one with only a small amount of molasses removed. If the product contains a lot of cereal by-products, the starch may still be higher than you want.

For many horses, the key balance is simple: enough calories for health and work, but not so much starch that the ration becomes unstable. That is why nutritional analysis should guide your choice more than branding or colour of the feed.

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Rules for horse feeding that are important when changing feeds

Good **horse feeding rules** help protect digestive function in the horse and minimise the likelihood of issues during product changes. These are closely related to the classic **10 rules of feeding horses**, which emphasise consistency, lots of forage, clean water, and gradual changes. If you are switching to a low sugar diet, the key rule is to introduce it slowly.

Here are the main rules to follow:

- Base the ration on **forage** as the foundation.
- Introduce feed changes over several days or longer if the horse is sensitive.

- Use a **gradual transition** when moving to a new feed.
- Keep the daily ration consistent in timing and quantity.
- Do not rely on over-reliance on hard feed when forage can meet the need.
- Monitor for signs of digestive upset, excitability, or loose droppings.

Feeding changes affect the microbial population in the gut, so the digestive shift should under no circumstances be rushed. A sudden switch from a high cereal ration to a fibre-only plan may seem harmless, but it can still affect the digestive system if done too quickly. Likewise, introducing more beet pulp or oil should be handled and careful.

Also consider forage quality. If forage is the bulk of the diet, then the forage itself must be appropriate. Low sugar feeding is not just about removing hard feed; it is about creating a complete feeding pattern that supports gut health and stable energy.

Using a horse feeding chart and calculator

A **horse feeding chart** provides you a useful reference point, but it should not replace practical judgment or individual assessment. A **horse feed calculator uk** tool can aid in estimate intake based on **bodyweight**, workload, and the type of feed you are considering. These resources are helpful because feeding rates change considerably between a resting horse, a light-work horse, and one doing regular exercise.

When working with a chart or calculator, start with these questions:

- What is the horse's estimated **bodyweight**?
- What is the horse's current **body condition score**?
- How much **forage** is already being eaten?
- What is the horse's **work level**?
- Is the aim maintenance, weight loss, or weight gain?

The **feeding rate** on the bag is only a rough guide. Some feeds are designed to be fed at low rates as a balancer-style ration; others need a higher volume to supply enough nutrients. If you use a calculator, check whether the ration includes forage, hard feed, and any supplements. The most accurate plan is one that combines the chart with the horse's condition over time.

For horses on restricted diets, the calculator should help prevent overfeeding. For harder keepers, it can show whether the current ration actually delivers enough nutrients without forcing the starch higher. In either case, it is a useful check before changing the feed plan.

Well-known reduced sugar horse feed manufacturers and companies

There are numerous **horse feed companies** providing products designed for lower starch and low sugar feeding. Well-known brands vary in formulation, but many have at least one fiber-based or controlled-energy option. **spillers horse feed** is a case in point of a company with products aimed at horses needing reduced starch or more controlled energy intake.

When reviewing brands, look at the product type rather than the logo. A brand may offer:

- a **feed balancer** for forage led diets
- a **low starch feed** for horses needing controlled calories
- a **complete horse feed** for convenience

- a conditioning product that uses fibre and oil rather than cereal

The presence of **pellets** or a **mash** format does not tell you whether the feed is suitable. What matters is the overall composition, especially sugar, starch, fibre, and energy density. A mash can be low sugar, and pellets can be low starch, but the analysis must confirm it.

Brand reputation can be useful, but product selection should always be based on the horse's needs. The best feed for a laminitis-prone good-doer may be very different from the best feed for a poor-doing horse in regular work.

How much does horse feed cost?

Horse feed cost depends on brand, formulation, bag size, and how much you feed each day. It is simple to focus on **bag price**, but that does not always show the true cost. A more concentrated feed may cost more per bag yet less per day because the **feeding rate** is lower.

To assess **value for money**, compare the daily cost rather than just the bag price. A balancer often seems expensive at first glance, but it may be cheaper than feeding large quantities of a less concentrated mix. Likewise, a low starch complete feed can sometimes replace several separate products, reducing both cost and complexity.

Think about these pricing factors:

- how many days a bag lasts
- if you also need a supplement
- the expense of adding **beet pulp**, **oil**, or a balancer
- the amount of wasted feed if the horse leaves part of the bucket

Often the cheapest product is not the best option if it leads to overfeeding, poor condition, or unnecessary extras. A practical low sugar ration often saves money by being more straightforward and more targeted.

Is it possible to make a low sugar horse feed mix recipe?

Yes, a simple **horse feed mix recipe** can be built from a few simple ingredients, provided it is balanced correctly. A common approach is to combine **beet pulp**, unmolassed chaff, a little **oil**, and a **balancer**. This gives fibre, calories, and nutrients without relying on cereal starch.

A simple low sugar mix might include:

- unmolassed chaff
- rehydrated beet pulp
- a measured amount of oil for extra energy
- a balancer for **vitamins and minerals**

This kind of ration can work well for horses needing condition, controlled energy, or a calmer feed. It is often a useful option for a **forage-based diet** because it adds useful nutrients without creating a cereal-heavy bowl. However, home mixing should be done carefully. A balanced ration is more than just ingredients; the proportions matter.

If you create your own mix, make sure it supports the horse's **protein** needs and does not unintentionally raise sugar or starch through other components. Also, be mindful of quality control. Ingredients should be fresh and stored well, because poor storage can increase the risk of contamination such as **mycotoxins**.

Horse feed for beginners: common mistakes to avoid

For **horse feed for beginners**, the biggest risk is usually overcomplication. New owners often assume more feed means better care, but that is not always true. The main mistakes are easy to avoid once you understand the basics.

- **Overfeeding:** feeding excessive hard feed when forage would suffice.
- **Sudden changes:** switching feeds without a **gradual transition**.
- **Starch overload:** feeding too many cereal-based feeds for a horse.
- **Ignoring forage:** prioritising buckets while forgetting the base of the diet.
- **Not checking analysis:** choosing by name rather than by figures.

Simple feeding plans should be easy to follow, repeatable, and matched to the horse's work and condition. Many horses do best on a forage-focused ration with a balancer or a very small amount of low starch feed. The horse's temperament, workload, and body condition score should guide the ration more than habit or marketing terms.

Quick quiz: what should I feed my horse?

Take this quick decision guide as a handy starting point. It is not a substitute for tailored advice, but it can help reduce the options fast.

- **If your horse is a good-doer or prone to laminitis:** go for forage first, then a balancer or very low sugar feed.
- **If your horse is excitable:** look for a cooling feed that is low in starch and based on fibre and oil.
- **If your horse needs to gain condition:** use a low starch conditioning feed, beet pulp, and oil rather than cereal-heavy mixes.
- **If your horse works lightly:** a balancer plus chaff may be enough.
- **If your horse is thin and in harder work:** feed a feed with controlled digestible energy and enough protein.

This is where a **horse condition score** becomes useful. A horse that is overweight needs a different diet from one that is lacking muscle or topline. The same is true for **work level**: a horse doing little work rarely needs a dense feed, while a horse in regular training may need more energy than forage alone can provide. Think in terms of the right **diet type** for the individual horse.

FAQs about low sugar and starch horse feed

What horse feed is the lowest in sugar and starch?

The most low-NSC options are usually forage-led feeds such as unmolassed chaff, a plain feed balancer, and fibre-based products built around beet pulp and other low NSC ingredients. The right option depends on the horse's condition and workload, but low sugar horse feed is typically one with a high fibre content, little or no molasses, and minimal grain content.

Is a complete horse feed suitable for low sugar diets?

Yes, a complete horse feed can be suitable if the nutritional analysis shows low sugar and low starch levels. Not every complete feed is the same, so check the ingredients list and the digestible energy value. A low starch complete horse feed can be a convenient option for horses that need a balanced ration without extra supplements.

How do I know if my horse needs low starch feed?

Look at the horse's body condition score, temperament, and health history. Horses with laminitis risk, horses that become sharp on richer rations, and easy-keeping horses often benefit from low starch feed. If the horse needs controlled energy and stable gut health, a lower starch approach is often sensible.

Can I feed beet pulp as part of a low sugar horse diet?

Yes, beet pulp is commonly used in low sugar horse feeding because it is a fibre source rather than a cereal. It can be soaked and used in a mash or mixed with chaff and a balancer. It is especially useful when you want more calories without increasing starch too much.

What should I avoid when choosing horse feed for a horse prone to laminitis?

Avoid feeds high in sugar and starch, especially cereal-heavy products that can cause starch overload. Also avoid sudden changes, overfeeding, and ration plans that ignore forage. For a horse prone to laminitis, the safest approach is usually a forage-based diet with low NSC horse feed, careful feeding rate control, and regular monitoring.