

What are cereals in horse feed?

Cereals are a frequent ingredient in horse feed, especially where extra starch and quick-release energy are needed. The main cereals used in horse feed are **oats**, **barley**, and **maize**. These can be helpful in some rations, but they are not the right choice for every horse. Understanding where cereals fit within the wider world of **types of horse feed** makes it easier to choose a ration that suits the horse's workload, temperament, and health.

In practical terms, cereals mainly supply starch and energy. That can be beneficial for some animals, but for others it may lead to a less suitable feeding pattern. Many owners now look for **cereal-free** options that rely more on **fibre**, **forage**, and slower-releasing energy sources. A good **horse feed** should meet the horse's needs, not just fill the bucket.

Cereal-based products may also include **molasses** for taste and dust control. While that can improve **palatability**, it may increase sugar content, which is worth considering if your horse is a **sensitive horse** or needs tighter control of starch and sugar. This is where the balance between convenience and **nutritional balance** becomes important.

Which horses should avoid cereal-based feed?

Not every horse needs a cereal-free ration, but many find it beneficial. Horses with **metabolic concerns**, including those prone to **laminitis** or challenges with **healthy metabolism**, are often better suited to feed that is lower in starch and sugar. A **forage-based** approach can help support steadier energy release and better **digestive function**.

This can also be helpful **horse feeding advice** for horses that get excitable on cereal-based feed. Some horses digest starch differently, and a ration that is too rich can affect behaviour, **condition score**, and long-term health. When a horse already has plenty of good-quality forage, extra cereal may be unneeded.

For owners unfamiliar with the subject, **horse feed for beginners** typically starts with the simplest question: what is the horse doing, and what does it truly require? A idle horse, a good-doer, a horse prone to weight gain, or a horse with a history of laminitis will often respond better on **low starch feed** or **high fibre feed** rather than a cereal-heavy ration.

A **performance horse** can still require extra energy, but that is not automatically a sign that cereals are the best choice. Numerous modern rations offer digestible energy through fibre and oil instead of large cereal inclusions. This may support work while being gentler on the hindgut.

What horse feed should avoid cereals?

In short: any horse feed chosen for a horse that cannot handle starch well, or where a grain-free approach is necessary to support digestive or nutritional health. A well-formulated **complete horse feed** can be cereal-free and still provide the right vitamins, minerals, and energy sources. As a result, many owners choose a **cereal-free feed** precisely because they want a simpler lower-starch ration without losing essential nutrients.

When comparing products, look for feeds built around **fibre** and forage rather than cereals. These often include chopped or pelleted ingredients designed to slow intake and support the hindgut. They may be used alone or alongside **chaff** to increase chewing time and help a horse feel content. This is especially useful for horses needing a calmer energy profile and steadier digestion.

A common point of confusion is the **horse feed mix recipe**. Some owners build their own ration by combining a balancer, fibre source, and oil rather [trusted horse feed suppliers UK](#) than using a cereal-based mix. That can work well if the ration is calculated carefully and the horse's total intake remains balanced. The key is not simply removing cereals, but replacing them with a careful combination of nutrients.

For many horses, a cereal-free ration suits horses that need:

- more controlled starch intake
- better **digestive health**
- more even **energy release**
- better support for **metabolic health**
- a more **forage-based** feeding programme

However, that does not mean every cereal-free feed is automatically correct. The best **horse feed** is the one that delivers the right **nutrients**, appropriate digestible energy, and enough fibre for the horse's workload and body condition.

How to read labels on cereal-free horse feed

Checking labels is one of the most useful parts of **horse feed advice uk**. Branding on the front of the bag can be useful, but the real detail is in the **ingredients list** and the analytical declaration. This is where you can check whether the feed is actually cereal-free or simply lower in cereals than other products.

Initially, look for the obvious cereal names: oats, barley, and maize. If they are absent, the feed may be cereal-free, but you should also check for cereal derivatives and by-products. Some **horse feed companies** use ingredients that still contribute starch or sugar even if the product appears gentle at first glance.

Second, look at the levels of starch and sugar if they are listed. A feed may be marketed as suitable for sensitive horses, but still contain more starch than you expect. This is particularly important if the horse has **metabolic issues** or a history that calls for tighter control.

Third, check whether the feed is designed as a **complete horse feed** or a complementary one. A complete product should supply a broader range of nutrients when fed as directed, while a complementary feed usually needs forage and possibly other feedstuffs to form a proper ration. Understanding that difference helps avoid gaps in the feeding programme.

When comparing brands, you may come across products from well-known names such as **spillers horse feed**. Brand reputation can help, but it is still worth comparing the label line by line. The right feed is not always the one with the boldest claims; it is the one whose ingredients and analysis suit the horse's actual needs.

How much should you feed rather than cereals?

The amount to feed depends on body weight, work level, current **condition score**, forage intake, and the kind of feed chosen. A **horse feeding chart** is a practical starting point, but it should not replace proper assessment of the individual horse. If you are using a **horse feed calculator uk**, make sure it considers forage, workload, and the rest of the ration instead of just concentrate amounts.

A key **horse feeding rules** is to feed according to need, not habit. If cereals are being removed, the replacement should not automatically be extra quantity of the same kind of concentrate. Instead, you may increase **forage**, add a **high fibre feed**, or use a balancer plus chaff and a small amount of oil or other digestible energy source.

For a horse on a maintenance programme, a **maintenance feed** or balancer may be sufficient alongside good forage. For a horse doing more work, a fibre-led ration can still provide energy without the same starch load. The right amount is about total daily intake, not just what is in the bucket at one time.

Use the feeding rate on the bag as a guide, then adjust with a feed adviser or vet if the horse has special needs. Small changes in a ration can have a big effect on palatability, body condition, and gut comfort. Never reduce cereals without considering the rest of the feeding programme, because the horse still needs enough nutrients to stay healthy.

Is cereal-free feed always the best choice?

Not in every case. Cereal-free feed can be a strong choice, but it is not automatically the best in every situation. The main advantage is usually a lower starch load and a more steady energy release. That can help maintain **digestive health**, **gut health**, and **metabolic health** in horses that need it. However, if the feed is poorly formulated, it may still fail to provide the right balance of **nutrients**.

Horse feed cost is another factor. These feeds can be costlier, particularly if they rely on specialist fibre sources, added oil, or targeted supplementation. That does not mean they are bad value. It means the decision should be based on the horse's needs, not just the lowest-cost bag on the shelf.

Some owners weigh up cereal-free products with established brands such as **spillers horse feed** and other **horse feed companies**. The main thing is to compare what the feed actually offers: energy, fibre, starch, sugar, vitamins, minerals, and suitability for the horse's workload. A balanced ration matters more than the label claim.

In short, cereal-free is often a smart choice for horses needing more even energy or improved digestive support. But the best feed is one that achieves **nutritional balance** without oversupplying calories or leaving the horse short of essential ingredients.

Ten rules for feeding horses when excluding cereals

The following **ten rules for feeding horses** can allow you to keep a cereal-free ration sensible and practical:

- Base the diet around **forage** initially.
- Select a **high fibre feed** where extra calories are needed.
- Select a **low starch feed** for horses that find cereals difficult.
- Inspect the **ingredients list** every time, not just the front label.
- Watch **condition score** so the horse does not become under- or overweight.
- Maintain **digestive health** by avoiding sudden ration changes.
- Offer small, regular meals if concentrates are used.
- Adjust the ration to workload, temperament, and body type.
- Include **supplements** only where there is a clear need.
- Reassess the full **feeding programme** whenever work, grazing, or health changes.

They are especially useful when creating a **forage-based** ration for a horse that does not suit cereals. They additionally help avoid common mistakes such as overfeeding concentrate or relying on a single product to solve every dietary need.

Typical errors with cereal-less horse diets

A typical pitfall is believing that taking out cereals automatically solves every feeding problem. Helpful **horse feed advice uk** always begins with the full picture: roughage quality, workload, body condition, dental health, and the horse's overall routine. If all of that are not right, the diet may still fail.

Another common error is underestimating how much energy the horse still needs. A cereal-free diet can be lower in starch, but it still has to provide enough digestible energy to keep the horse in good shape. If the ration is too restricted, the horse may lose weight or look dull. That is why **condition score** matters so much.

Some owners also neglect about palatability. A feed may be technically ideal but still be rejected if the horse dislikes it. Mixing fibre sources with suitable textures, using **chaff**, and making gradual changes can help. A horse that stops eating properly will quickly lose the benefit of any carefully chosen ration.

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+44 800 422 0888

sales@bifid.co.uk

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There is also the risk of not replacing cereals intelligently. If you remove oats, barley, and maize without planning, the diet may become short of key **nutrients** or excessively high in one ingredient type. That can weaken both **digestive health** and **metabolic health**.

Finally, avoid treating all horses the same. A pony prone to weight gain, a sensitive leisure horse, and a hard-working competition horse all need different feeding solutions. The best horse feeding advice is always individual, practical, and based on the horse in front of you.

FAQs about cereal-free horse feed

What horse feed should avoid cereals?

Horse feed should avoid cereals when the horse has a history of laminitis, metabolic issues, excitable behaviour, poor starch tolerance, or when a lower-starch ration is simply a better fit for its workload and body condition. In these cases, a **cereal-free** or **low starch feed** built around fibre and forage is often more appropriate.

Why do some horses need a cereal-free diet?

Some horses need a cereal-free diet because they digest more comfortably with fibre than with starch, and because cereals can put extra strain on **digestive health** and **metabolic health**. A cereal-free ration can support steadier energy release, better gut function, and a more controlled feeding programme.

Is complete horse feed always cereal-free?

No, it is not. A **complete horse feed** is not always cereal-free. Some complete feeds contain cereals, while others are designed without them. Always inspect the **ingredients list** and the nutritional analysis rather than relying on the product name alone.

How can I tell if a horse feed is low in starch?

To tell if a horse feed is low in starch, read the label carefully and look for starch and sugar values if they are given. Check the ingredients for oats, barley, maize, and other cereal sources. If the feed is advertised as **high fibre feed** or **low starch feed**, that is a useful clue, but the full analysis is still essential.

How much horse feed should I give if I avoid cereals?

The amount depends on the horse, the workload, the forage being offered, and the chosen ration. A **horse feeding chart** or **horse feed calculator uk** can help you begin, but you should adjust according to body condition and appetite. If cereals are removed, you may need to replace them with fibre-based energy, a balancer, or other suitable feedstuffs rather than simply reducing the total ration.