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Giving A Foal A Good Start

By Mark Woodcock

Having only been a horse owner for 10 months, to suddenly find myself with a foal to care for was quite a shock.

My horse is a traditional coloured cob, prone to be a bit on the large side anyway, so she hid the foal very well. So well in fact that it was not until we found her early one morning with a foal at her side that we realised!

A call to the vet advised me that as long as the foal was suckling and the mare was calm, everything was ok, but to keep an eye on them both for the first few hours.

Try stopping me ! Still in the clothes I had grabbed and thrown on at 7am I spent the whole day gazing in awe at my new and unexpected arrival and her clever mum.

I gave my mare a good feed with plenty of supplements to make sure that she started to produce the milk she would need and she allowed me to have a close look at her foal, who at only a couple of hours old was very sturdy.

My next thought was "what do I do now – how do I make sure that this little foal gets a good start in her life with people. " I knew that I would not be able to keep the foal as I could not afford 2 horses in livery, but I wanted to make sure that when she left me, she was happy that people were her friends.

I spoke to a natural horsemanship expert, who advised me to introduce the foal to as many different things as possible, and get her used to being handled as early as possible. Fortunately my horse had no problem with this and was happy for all the kids from the yard to come and adore her foal. The foal was happy to have her feet picked up once she had trusted me to support her until she found her balance on 3 legs. She loved being groomed and once we had a foal slip on, soon learnt to walk quietly with me on a lead rope, by being patient and letting her own curiosity encourage her to walk towards me.

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This was particularly useful when I needed to bring mum and foal into the yard and pop her into a stable if the blacksmith or vet was coming.

As the foal got bigger I had to work on teaching her about "my space" as a boisterous foal at shoulder height could easily have knocked me over and she had to learn not to bump into me.

We had a lot of fun for the months that the foal was with me and although it broke my heart when I had to part with her, it gave me great pleasure when she trustingly trotted into the trailer to go back to the farm that my mare had come from. I am sure that the foal will take to all the other things she has to learn over the next couple of years with equal confidence and trust and be as kind and gentle as my horse is.

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<http://www.horseback-riding-vacation.info>

How To Care For Your New Foal.

By Mark Andrews

You have waited eleven months for your foal to arrive. Now he is here what can you do to ensure he gets off to the best possible start in life?

Make sure that the foal sucks. A normal foal should stand and drink from the mare within two hours. If the foal is having difficulty sucking, or is not interested, he may have serious problems. Call an experienced horse vet sooner rather than later.

Colostrum, the first milk, is very important. It contains all the antibodies your foal needs to protect him from infectious disease. A foal needs between 1.5 – 2 litres of good quality colostrum. It is most important to make sure he gets enough.

If the foal won't suck you can collect some colostrum from the mare and give it by bottle. Or the vet can put it directly into the foal's stomach using a tube. Colostrum substitutes are available if the mare doesn't have any milk.

The foal's intestines can only absorb colostrum for the first 24 hours or so. After that, the vet can give a plasma transfusion to boost the antibodies if necessary.

Check that the foal is passing meconium. Meconium is the firm dark feces that has built up during the foal's time inside the mare. Colt foals, in particular, can have problems passing this because their pelvis is narrow. Your vet may recommend giving an enema.

It is a good idea to have the vet to give the foal a check-up. The vet can give an injection to protect the foal from tetanus. This is especially important if the mare has not been vaccinated recently. A blood

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sample can be taken from the foal to check that adequate antibodies have been absorbed. Probiotics may be useful in preventing "foal heat scours", which often occur about 10 days of age. The diarrhoea is probably due to the digestive system adapting to life outside the mare rather than anything to do with the mare's hormones.

Carefully monitor the foal's progress. Even those foals that appear normal at birth can develop problems later on. Foals should become brighter and more active over the first few days. One of the first signs of serious infection is that the foal becomes dull or spends more time sleeping.

With good care and attention from an early age you and your new foal can look forward to an exciting future together.

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<http://www.thefoalingguide.com>

) He also runs the

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