

10 Tips for Giving Horses Oral Medications

Horses aren't always the best patients. And, when it comes to getting necessary medications into their mouths, even the shortest pony can turn into an equine version of a giraffe. Still others will eat around medications, leaving a pill-powder pile at the bottom of their troughs. Delivering oral medications often requires experimentation to see what works for each individual. Here are some tips to help you out.

Powdered and flavored medications can be top dressed and mixed into a horse's regular feed ration.



MICHELLE ANDERSON

1 Powder-form medications are easy to pour over a horse's feed ration, and many come flavored to make them more appetizing to horses. Some horses will eat these without much fuss, while others need more persuasion.

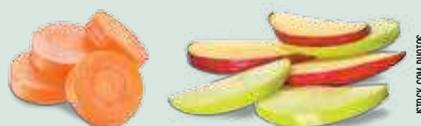
2 If using pills rather than powders, you might need to crush them first. Use a clean mortar and pestle or a coffee grinder dedicated to medications. Note that some coated pills should not be crushed—consult your veterinarian for instructions.



THE HORSE STAFF

3 Is your horse not convinced? Try adding a liquid, such as water, apple juice, or molasses, to make a mash in which to mix the medication. Caution: Avoid adding sugary substances when medicating horses with metabolic issues, such as equine metabolic syndrome (EMS) or insulin resistance. For example, if your horse is suffering an EMS-related laminitic episode, don't use sugar to administer medications.

4 Experiment by adding some of your horse's favorite treats, such as alfalfa pellets, beet pulp, and/or carrot or apple slices, to the mix.



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5 While one horse might find his medication-laced ration unappealing, a companion might be happy to clean up all the treats and goodies in his bucket, along with his medication dose. Make sure to feed the horse by himself.

6 Some horses can cleverly eat around the medication in their feed buckets. Check their bucket to make sure they haven't left any of their dose behind.

7 Is your horse unwilling to eat his meds in his feed, no matter what tasty treats you add? Then you might need to use a syringe to dispense them directly into his mouth. Try mixing the medication powder into no-sugar-added applesauce, then draw the mixture into a syringe. The applesauce helps cover the medication taste—which is usually bitter. Horses are quick to learn that the syringe contents don't taste good, so mixing with applesauce can make your job easier over the course of treatment.



8 You don't have applesauce on hand? Some pills will dissolve in water (ask your vet which ones!). For these, you can load the appropriate dose into a syringe (2-ounces is a good size) and dissolve it. Just remove the plunger, plug the open end with your finger, add water, replace the plunger, and shake until well-mixed. Be careful that the plunger—and the meds—don't fly out while you're shaking it.



To administer medications, halter your horse, slide the syringe up one side of the horse's mouth inside the cheek, and try to dispense the mixture onto the tongue. Hold your horse's head up until he swallows. Use this same technique when dosing your horse with paste medications that come in pre-loaded syringes.

10 BONUS TIP: If your horse is reluctant to swallow, run your thumb on the tongue between his teeth like you would when putting a bit in his mouth (careful, those teeth are sharp). This motion will usually cause a horse to move his tongue vigorously and swallow.

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