

Weaning

Weaning can be a stressful time for both the mare and the foal. Some studies have shown that many stable vices develop at this point in time. An American study on the timing of weaning has shown that those foals weaned at 12 weeks of age grew out better than foals weaned later in life. Part of this I feel sure is due to the dramatic change in the quality of the mare's milk after 3 months.

I'm too much of a "softy" to wean a foal at this age. I tend to rely on my perception of how the foal is relating to its dam and to the other foals in the paddock. If I recognize that the foal, when aged 16-20 weeks, is spending most of its day with the other foals, and only visiting mum for a top-up at the "milk bar", then I reckon it will do better if it gets all its hard feed, instead of sharing what mum will let it have, and drinks to satisfy its thirst rather than its hunger.

To minimize the stress to the foal, I change as little in its environment as possible. Thus, the foal remains in its normal paddock, with all its friends, while the milk bar is removed from sight and sound. If the mare is to be returned to its owner's stable this is even better. This arrangement has resulted in the foals being successfully weaned, showing signs of distress for only a short period of time. None of my weanlings have ever developed or exhibited a stable vice.

The mare normally shows signs of distress for a period of two to three days. The mare is not provided any additional feeding following weaning to limit her production of milk. All milk production will cause her some discomfort; something that needs to be carefully managed.

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