

## Grazing Muzzles Reduce Pasture Intake

Many horses and ponies today are overweight, putting them at risk for disorders associated with obesity including insulin resistance, laminitis and equine metabolic syndrome (EMS). These diseases are associated with exceeding caloric intake requirements and high intakes of nonstructural carbohydrates (NSC), thus feed restriction and stall/dry lot confinement are recommended. Grazing muzzles offer horse owners an effective method for reducing forage intake for animals housed on pastures. By allowing horses to be turned out on pasture wearing grazing muzzles, they can exercise freely and burn calories rather than remain confined in stalls.

### Grazing muzzle research study

Researchers from the UK studied four adult ponies grazing with and without grazing muzzles to test their efficacy at reducing forage intake. The basket type nylon grazing muzzles had a plastic bottom with a 2 cm diameter hole to eat through. Ponies were studied in three hour grazing periods and pasture intake was estimated by changes in bodyweight. The results indicated:

- Forage intake was reduced by 85% when wearing a muzzle
- Ponies *without* muzzles consumed 0.8% of their bodyweight (BW) in 3 hours (greatly exceeding nutrient requirements)
- Forage intake was reduced to 0.14% BW over 3 hours when wearing a muzzle

### Tips on using grazing muzzles

- Acclimate the horse to wearing the muzzle gradually
- Properly fit the muzzle so it isn't too tight or doesn't hang too low
- New muzzles may smell unusual and make the horse sneeze
- Muzzles prevent horses from protecting themselves with their mouths so group horses appropriately according to dominance
- Make sure the horse is drinking when wearing the muzzle
- Use a muzzle with a safety strap or breakaway halter

### Does my horse need to wear a grazing muzzle?

If your horse is overweight and/or is predisposed to laminitis, insulin resistance or EMS, then a grazing muzzle is likely needed when the animal is turned out on pasture. It is especially important to restrict pasture intake in the Spring and Fall in Tennessee when cool season grasses accumulate higher concentrations of NSC which can trigger the onset of diseases like laminitis.

*For more information on the UK research study see:*

*Longland, A, P. Harris and C. Barfoot. 2011. Journal of Equine Vet Science 31:283.*



Grazing muzzles reduce forage intake



Questions or comments? Contact Dr. Bridgett McIntosh, UT Extension Equine Specialist

Email us at [bmcintosh@utk.edu](mailto:bmcintosh@utk.edu) or call 615.832.8341 <http://animalscience.ag.utk.edu/>

<http://www.masterhorseowner.utk.edu>

[Disclaimer](#) [Indicia](#) [EEO/AA Statement/Non-Discrimination Statement](#)

