The horse has a life cycle that can be broken down into four very distinct phases. Beginning at birth, the horse evolves into adolescence, adulthood and finally old age.

**Foal (Birth to weaning)**

Horses are born after a gestation period of 340 days. Until they are weaned, they are called foals. After they are weaned, they are called weanlings.

**Adolescence (Yearlings and two-year-olds)**

Horses grow quickly in their first year, when they are called yearlings. A yearling has almost grown into its mature height and its body frame starts to fill out. Many yearlings have different growth periods that make them look unbalanced and uncoordinated. Horses reach puberty between two and three years of age. Their growth rate slows down considerably during this time, but it not complete until the horse is four to five years of age.

**Adulthood**

A horse finally reaches maturity at the age of four or five. Females are now referred to as mares, and males as stallions or geldings.

**Old Age**

By their late teens or early twenties, horses begin to show the signs of aging. Their backs may begin to sag, and many develop health problems. In the wild, these conditions contribute to rapid deterioration and death. With proper care and management, horses can live into their mid- to late-twenties.
WHAT HORSES NEED: CARE FOR NEWBORN FOALS AND THEIR MOTHERS

A healthy newborn foal should be able to stand within one hour of delivery and should be nursing within two hours. The foal should be observed frequently during the first few weeks of life to detect early signs of disease. Signs of disease or illness can include lethargy and lack of strength when nursing. An overly extended udder on the mare can also be a sign that the foal is not nursing. All foals require **colostrum**, a substance found in the mare’s first milk, within the first 6 to 12 hours of life so they can acquire immunity to disease and infection.

**The first few hours of a newborn foal’s life are critical.**

As the foal grows, he or she needs a gradual transition from nursing to a diet of solid feed.

Young foals are at risk of a variety of respiratory diseases and diarrhea. Breathing rate and effort, body temperature, nursing behaviour and manure consistency should be monitored. A healthy newborn foal should consume 15 to 25 percent of his or her bodyweight in milk daily and gain on average half to one kg per day. Excessive weight gain, unusually rapid growth spurts or a diet unbalanced in calories, protein, calcium, phosphorous, and trace minerals may place a foal at risk of metabolic bone disease.

The body condition scoring system can be used to assess the relative body fat of a mare and growing foal. The ideal body condition score for a foal is between five and six.

### What to Watch For

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs</th>
<th>What is Normal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td>38.8°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heat Rate</td>
<td>80-100 beats per minute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing Rate</td>
<td>20-40 breaths per minute (70 bpm at birth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing</td>
<td>In under one hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suckling</td>
<td>In under two hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>First bowel movement</td>
<td>Within three to four hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing frequency</td>
<td>An average of three to five times per hour</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What does the Code of Practice say about the care of mares and foals?

Mare Management

- Mares must be provided with a nutritionally balanced diet prior to breeding, throughout gestation and during lactation.
- Mares to be bred/inseminated should be handled as quietly as possible.
- Pregnant mares should be allowed to exercise. The amount of exercise during pregnancy should reflect the activity level prior to pregnancy and should in no way threaten the health of the mare and/or fetus.
- Mares should be managed so that they are in suitable body condition at the time of breeding and foaling. A body condition score of 5 or better on the 1-9 scale is recommended.
- Mares should be routinely monitored for health status throughout the gestation period. A health program should be designed in consultation with a veterinarian. This health program should include prefoaling instructions for attendants. Any mare requiring veterinary care during pregnancy must receive such care.

Foaling

- Where a foaling stall or paddock is used, it should safely confine both mare and foal. It is recommended that the mare be given the opportunity to become familiar with the stall, foaling area or paddock several days before foaling.
- Mares foaling on pasture should be provided with a clean, hazard free area. Sheltered foaling areas should be provided when foaling may coincide with adverse weather conditions.
- Mares generally foal without complications. Before administering assistance to a mare, attendants should be familiar with the signs of a normal delivery. Mares having difficulty foaling should be assisted immediately, preferably by a licensed veterinarian.
- After delivery, the umbilical cord should be allowed to sever on its own.

Care of the Neonate

- Newborn foals must ingest adequate amounts of colostrum as soon as possible after birth, preferably by nursing within the first six hours of life. Previously frozen colostrum should be available in the event that foals are unable to nurse, or the mare’s colostrum is unavailable or of poor quality.
- The newborn foal should consume 250 ml of colostrum per hour for the first twelve hours. Feeding colostrum after 24 hours is of limited value.
- Foals should be observed regularly (preferably daily) during the first month of life to ensure that they are adequately nourished and healthy. If abnormalities are observed, a licensed veterinarian should be consulted.
- Orphaned foals need specialized care. The best option is to foster the foal onto a nurse mare as soon as possible.
- If a nurse mare is not available, ensure that the foal receives adequate colostrum... The foal should then be fed a foal milk replacer containing 15-18% fat and 18-22% crude protein made from milk products. For days 2 and 3, the foal should be fed a daily volume equal to 10-15% its body weight, at a rate of 250-500 mls (8-16 ounces) every 1-2 hours around the clock. Starting on day 4, increase the volume to 20% of body weight and adjust the feeding interval to every 3-4 hours. Free choice nipple or bucket feeding is recommended to achieve this level of intake.
• By two weeks of age, the foal should be provided
  with a commercial foal ration and a high quality
  hay. Free choice water should be available at
  all times.
• Foals should be kept in a warm, dry, well
  bedded area.

**Foal Care**

• A high quality forage and commercial foal ration
  may be made available on a free choice basis by
  7-10 days of age to promote normal growth and
  development. After 60 days, mare’s milk is not
  sufficient to meet the nutrient requirements of
  the foal.
• Foals should be raised outdoors, where
  possible. If mares and foals are kept indoors,
  the opportunity for regular exercise should be
  provided for normal development.

The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling
of Horses will be updated and completed by the
summer of 2013. Information on the progress of this
new Code can be found on the National Farm Animal
Care Council website at [www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-
practice/equine](http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-
practice/equine).

• Foals may be weaned from 3-6 months of age,
  depending on the health status of both the mare
  and the foal. Weaning is stressful for mare and
  foal; strategies should be employed to minimize
  this stress.

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The process for the development of updated Codes can be accessed
through the National Farm Animal Care Council at [www.nfacc.ca/codes-
of-practice](http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice).