

Oral Horse Medications, How to Administer

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Giving oral medication to a horse is no easy task. Frustration mounts as he eats around the pill you artfully hid within the feed, or sniffs suspiciously at the powder you mixed with "irresistible" applesauce. Yet, you can't stop trying. Your horse must get the total dose of medicine at the correct time for the prescribed number of days. As you experiment with different oral feeding techniques, keep in mind that there are established methods of administering oral medications. Combining these methods with your horse's personal preferences will help you find a successful system.

How to administer pastes

1. Place the tip of the paste syringe in the corner of your horse's mouth.
2. Raise your horse's head.
3. Move the syringe tip around to stimulate movement of the tongue.
4. Inject medication.

Tips for pastes

- For horses who spit out the medication, make sure you get the tongue moving. This movement causes the paste to stick to the tongue and gums, so the medication will be swallowed eventually.
- For thick pastes, use a syringe with a wider tip. Regular sized syringes may have too narrow of a tip and can become blocked.
- Make paste more palatable by mixing in a few teaspoons of a sticky, sweet treat such as molasses, applesauce, or corn syrup.
- Use a [dosing syringe](#) to help administer medications to even the finickiest of horses.

How to administer powders and granules

- Mix powders or granules directly with feed.
- Check bottom of feed bucket after feeding to make sure entire mixture has been eaten.

Tips for powders and granules

- Not all medications can be given with food; check labeling if unsure.
- Try adding molasses to the feed. The molasses will help prevent the powders or granules from separating from the feed.

How to administer tablets

With a balling gun, which is a special, syringe-like device to administer tablets and capsules:

1. Place the balling gun in the corner of your horse's mouth.
2. Gently push balling gun tip to the back of your horse's tongue.
3. Raise your horse's head.
4. Push the balling gun plunger to dispense the tablet.
5. Watch to make sure your horse swallows the medication.

By crushing:

1. Crush tablet(s) with a mortar and pestle.
2. Administer the crushed tablet;
 - Mix crushed tablet(s) with feed.
 - Dissolve the crushed tablet(s) in a small amount of water to form a paste.

Tips for tablets

- Consult with your veterinarian before crushing tablets. Some tablets with special coatings must be given whole.
- Use caution when crushing tablets, make sure you do not inhale any of the substance.
- Small tablets can be mixed with feed without crushing.

As your horse becomes accustomed to receiving oral medications, your job of administering will become easier. Enlist a friend to help you in your task, as extra hands are always good. Also, always come prepared. Don't wait until you are standing by the horse to grind the pill and load the syringe.