

Fact Sheet

Preparing Your Mare For Breeding

Is your mare suitable to breed from?

The most important consideration is whether your mare is suitable to breed from.

- **How old is she?** Older maiden mares have much lower fertility rates than younger mares or those that have foaled before
- **Has she had a foal before?** If she has had previous foals, then a detailed history of the insemination and pregnancy can be helpful
- **Are there any undesirable genetic traits that could be passed on to the foal?** Certain types of orthopaedic disease can be passed on so it's important to talk to your vet before making your decision



Choosing the stallion

Once you're happy you have a suitable mare the next thing to choose is the stallion.

As well as his type and credentials, it is important to consider the type of semen that is available from the stallion:

- **Is it by natural cover?** In which case it is likely your mare will have to travel to him
- **Is it by artificial insemination?** Your vet will need to know whether it is frozen or chilled semen and how many days it will take to order

Clear communication with the stallion's manager is essential so that we can get the timings right.



The equine reproductive cycle

Mares are seasonally polyoestrous, which means they have multiple cycles but only during the breeding season. Mares cycle when the length of daylight is long, so in this hemisphere that is generally between March and September. During the winter when the daylight is short they are in anoestrus - where their ovaries are inactive. During the transitional period as the daylight increases, their ovaries become active and start producing follicles. The transitional period finishes when they have a surge of luteinizing hormone causing ovulation. After that they establish a regular cycle of ovulation generally every 21 days. During these cycles the ovaries will produce waves of follicles and usually one follicle will become dominant, getting close to ovulation (when the egg is released from the follicle into oviduct, ready for fertilisation) when it reaches a certain size.



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Oestrus

The time around ovulation is called oestrus, during this time mares are receptive to breeding and usually display signs of being “in season”. This generally lasts 3-6 days.

In most mares you'll be able to track their cycles by monitoring their oestrus behaviour but we can also accurately pinpoint where they are in their cycle via trans rectal ultrasonography. The cycle can then be managed using hormones, which is hugely beneficial when getting the timing of insemination right.

Signs of oestrus:

- Frequent urination
- Squatting and winking
- Raised tail
- Standing still



Pregnancy Diagnosis

- The first scan to check for pregnancy is 14-16 days post ovulation. The timing of this scan is important not only to check for a pregnancy but also to detect twins. Unfortunately, the equine uterus is not well designed to carry twins, one foetus needs the entire endometrial surface (uterus lining) to fulfil its nutritional requirements. As a result, twins usually result in the abortion of one or both foetuses in mid to late gestation and if a live foetus is delivered they are rarely viable. If twins are discovered at this early stage we would normally squeeze one embryo so that only one continues
- The next landmark is the heartbeat scan which is normally done around days 25-28. Placentation (the formation, type and structure of the placenta) begins around day 32-35, after which the pregnancy should be well established, so we recommend a third scan around days 42-45. This confirms the pregnancy is still viable after the highest risk period has passed



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This factsheet was created by the VetPartners Equine Team, with assistance from our Marketing Team and Veterinary Regulatory Advisors.

For further information, please contact your local VetPartners Equine Veterinary Practice on:

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