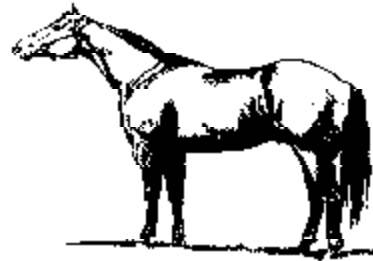


## **Animal Science Horse Information Series**

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### **GETTING OLDER MARES IN FOAL**

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**Can an 80-year-old woman have a baby? When a 26-year-old mare has a foal, she's equivalent in age to an 80-year-old woman.**

**Research shows that once mares get to be 16 years-old, their reproductive ability decreases rather rapidly. Horse breeders want foals out of proven, producing mares. Naturally, mares which have had several good foals will be older.**

**Older mares get pregnant as readily as younger mares, but they do not stay pregnant. There is a higher incidence of early embryonic deaths in older mares.**

**Research indicates that the problem is the age of the ovum (egg). Older mares have older ova which are more susceptible to early embryonic death. The uterus of the older mare seems to be capable of providing an adequate environment for a fetus.**

**What can the horse breeder do to get and keep older mares in foal?**

**Older mares must be in good body condition. Data from Texas A & M University show that thin mares are less likely to become pregnant and remain pregnant. But, it is not wise to get older mares fat. The extra weight could negatively affect their movement, especially if they have arthritis.**

**Horse breeders should have a uterine biopsy taken of older mares, which is a good predictor of a mare's ability to stay pregnant. Mares with a Grade III biopsy have less than a 10 percent chance of having a foal. With a Grade IIB biopsy, she has a 10-50 percent chance of having a foal. A Grade I or Grade IIA gives probabilities of 80-90 percent and 50-80 percent of foaling.**

**One has to question the advisability of mating older mares which have a Grade III biopsy.**

**Mares with an active endometritis, infection of the uterine lining, are less likely to get pregnant. Endometrial cytology and a culture aid in detecting any active endometritis.**

**Older mares should be bred to highly fertile stallions and bred or inseminated at the optimum time regarding ovulation, which is 24-48 hours before ovulation.**

**Often older mares need a Caslick's procedure, which is sewing together the upper parts of the vulva lips. Older mares often aspirate contaminated air or fecal material into their vagina, resulting in an infection.**

**Post-mating observations are also important. Ultrasound older mares 12-24 hours after breeding to determine if they ovulated and if any fluids exist in the uterus. If so, it is advisable**

to give them oxytocin and/or flush them with saline.

Infusing mares with antibiotics after mating is a controversial issue. Some veterinarians recommend it, while others do not. When mares are bred by artificial insemination, it is not necessary to infuse an antibiotic, which are added to the semen before insemination.

Another controversial practice is administration of exogenous progesterone. While data does not indicate that it aids in maintaining pregnancy, some veterinarians give it, especially to older mares with a history of early embryonic loss.

Pregnancy check older mares at 14-18 days and again at 40 days post-breeding. Mares not pregnant at these times can be treated so they will return to estrus for future breeding before the end of the breeding season. It is recommended to keep mating older mares that do have early embryonic losses. There is the possibility that a pregnancy will carry to term.

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