

Essential Oils Help Take the Stress Out of Weaning

By Frances Fitzgerald Cleveland

It makes perfect “scents” to use essential oils during the weaning process. Weaning is something that is inevitable; it happens naturally in the wild. It does not have to be a dreaded process. If done consciously and considerately it can be an easy and stress free process. The key is preparedness.

Foals are typically weaned between 4 to 6 months of age in domestic situations. Mother and foal both experience stress during this process. There have been studies performed that show you do not have to tear mother and foal apart and separate them from sight, sound and touch. One particular study by Cynthia McCall, PhD, at Texas A&M University in the 1985's indicates that the best way to wean your foals is to let them have fence-line contact with their dams. This particular study showed that within the first week of weaning, stress was greatly reduced (vocalizations, fretfulness and adrenal cortisol levels in the bloodstream) when compared to foals separated completely from their mothers with no physical contact. The fence-line study indicated it was easier on the mare and foal, they were able to see, touch and smell one another, but the foals were prevented from nursing. It is also helpful to creep feed prior to weaning. Creep feeding is the process of providing feed in a separate area where the foal can eat without interference from the mare. And, it is important to continue to feed the same creep feed during the weaning process.

D. Douglas Householder, PhD, at Texas A&M University, Department of Animal Science Equine Sciences Program, shares some insights to weaning in his paper, *“Minimizing Weaning Stress in Foals”*. He suggests [you start foals on a “foal health program” well in advance of weaning, they should be wormed at 4 – 6 weeks of age and immunizations at 2 – 3 months. Foals should be handled as quietly as possible so that at weaning time they will be accustomed to handling. Foals should also be started on creep feed at 2 – 3 months and provided high quality pasture and/or hay. Dr. Householder feels it is important to have foals on feed well before weaning time. Also, make sure the foal's new area [place you are separating your foal to] is safe, and clean, and they have been introduced him to the area prior to weaning.

Weaning can be one of the most stressful times in a young horse's life and that is why one should consider the use of essential oils during this process. The foal has been with his[its] mother for the first part of his[their] life receiving nourishment and security. Then, all at once, this is taken away. This causes stress and the response to this stress can be weight loss, injuries and an impaired immune system. By weaning the foal using the fence-line contact method (they should not be able to nurse) and using essential oils, you can reduce the stress to a minimum or eliminate it.

The beauty of using essential oils is that not only will the oil help the foal and mother adjust to the stressful situation, it will also balance them, thereby reducing the risk of an impaired immune system and the feeling of loss. While preparing for the weaning process, and during it, have the following oils available: Lavender, Neroli, Roman Chamomile, Rose, Sandalwood, Thyme, Violet Leaf, Vetiver and Yarrow. These nine oils are the best picks to use for this process because:

- ✧ **Lavender:** It has been suggested that lavender helps to stabilize the Physical, Etheric and Astral bodies, which indicates a positive effect on the psychological disorders. It cleanses and soothes the spirit relieving anger, and exhaustion, resulting in a calmer approach to life. Helps to bring down high blood pressure and calm palpitations. A very well known anti-depressant.
- ✧ **Neroli:** It is an oil known to calm and stabilize the heart. It has a very powerful psychological effect offering a feeling of emotional harmony. It is extremely useful where there is sadness due to loss or separation of a companion, either human or animal (i.e. the weaning process). It is known to be one of the most sedative and anti-depressant oils. Helps to relax the nerves and uplift the spirits.

- ✧ **Roman Chamomile:** This oil helps with the nervous tension, and has a calming effect on the emotions especially with a worrisome situation. It helps with insomnia and stress related complaints. If there is an issue with an upset stomach, colic, indigestion or dyspepsia this oil will help to calm these situations. (*avoid during early months of pregnancy*)
- ✧ **Rose Otto:** This beautiful oil helps heal the heart when there is loss. It is a great anti-depressant. Helps with nervous tension associated with trauma, anger, resentment, fear and anxiety. Helps to balance the female hormones. It is suggested that Rose is self-nurturing and helps with self-esteem. It is very helpful for dealing with behavioral problems and emotional stress. It also helps with sadness, grief, or disappointment.
- ✧ **Sandalwood:** With its calming and harmonizing effect it helps to reduce tension and confusion. It is ideal for nervous depression, fear, stress and hectic lifestyle (i.e. the weaning process). This oil fosters openness, warmth and understanding. Helps with diarrhea, nausea, dry and/or persistent coughs, bronchitis and catarrh. Helps to stimulate the immune system and keep infections at bay. Helps with people who think too much (i.e. a worrisome foal or mare).
- ✧ **Thyme:** Strengthens the nerves and activates the brain cells thereby aiding memory and concentration. Lifts the spirits, relieves feelings of exhaustion and combats depression. Also, said to help release mental blockages and trauma. This fortifying and uplifting oil is a neurotonic, indicated for nervous disability and chronic anxiety. This oil is very beneficial to the immune system. A digestive stimulant and intestinal antiseptic also known to help expel worms. This oil is known to instill courage and valor. (*Could be a skin irritant, do not use in cases of high blood pressure of pregnancy.*)
- ✧ **Violet Leaf:** This divine oil strengthens and comforts the heart. Contains salicylic acid: a natural painkiller. Helps with nervous exhaustion. This oil will not dull the senses; rather it will help keep the animal in control, maintaining inner strength that would otherwise be depleted. Its sedative properties overcome insomnia and banish feelings of anger and anxiety. It has been known to restore the bonds of friendship.
- ✧ **Vetiver:** With its balancing effect on the central nervous system it instills a centered feeling. Said to cleanse the aura. Despite its sedative action it is very helpful in cases of mental and physical exhaustion. It revitalizes the body by fortifying the red corpuscles crucial in transporting oxygen to all parts of the body. Increases blood flow, alleviates muscular aches and pains, and helps with rheumatism and arthritis. A calming oil that helps with stress and tension. Also helps to ground people/animals who feel out of balance.
- ✧ **Yarrow:** It has been labeled as a form of “rescue remedy”. Helps to release past issues. Very useful when used alongside rose oil. Helps with hypertension, insomnia, stress related conditions. According to Susanne Fischer-Rizzi, she states, “the oil is helpful during times of major life changes (such as mid-life crisis, menopause, or other times of transition)”. This oil helps to heal emotional and/or physical wounds. Helps to release deeply repressed emotions such as anger and embitterment. This oil is most appropriate for those whom feelings of anger and rage are linked subconsciously with emotional wounding or vulnerability. Stimulates secretions of gastric and intestinal glands and improves sluggish digestion. Balances the nervous component of digestion improving absorption and digestive secretions, helpful for colic and flatulence. Stimulates bile, aiding in digestion of fats, and encourages appetite.

These nine oils are ideal for a stressful situation. Some of their chemical compositions include: Sesquiterpene : which has calming properties; Ketones: calming and sedative properties; Phenols: stimulant to the nervous system, effective in some depressive states and stimulant to the immune system. Mentioned above are just some of the chemical and emotional properties these oils contain and address. A few also have benefits to physical symptoms during the weaning process.

How should you work with these oils? The best method to apply these oils is to first properly dilute them. It is recommended that a base oil of soybean oil or cold pressed canola oil to be used for dilution. Have 5ml dropper bottles for each essential oil you will be using. Fill the dropper bottles with the base oil and then add 2 – 3 drops of essential oil. It is important to dilute the essential oils. The oils are powerful and a small amount goes a long way.

Start introducing the foal to the oils 4 to 7 days prior to weaning. You can offer the mother the oils too. This will give them a chance to start feeling the comfort these oils will provide. On the day of weaning offer the foal and mother the oils thirty minutes before separation and again near the end of the day. If the foal starts to show some stress prior to this time, offer the oils to them. Offer all the oils two times a day, apply the ones they are interested in. When should you stop offering the oils? Stop offering the oils when the mare and foal have shown no interest in them for two days.

The key to offering the oils to the foal/mother is to show them one oil at a time. By judging their response to the oil you will know whether to apply the oil or not for that day. If the mare/foal tries to lick or eat the bottle (remember to hold onto the bottle firmly) and/or hangs their head and keeps inhaling with one or both nostrils, this indicates a positive response. These responses demonstrate the mare/foal likes the oils, wants them applied and it is what they need for the present situation. If the mare/foal turns away from the oil, is easily distracted from the oil or backs away, this indicates they are not interested and the oil should not be applied. Never force an essential oil on them. Animals know what they want and when they need it so follow their lead.

For application of the oil that they are interested in, put 3-4 drops in your hand, [and] show them your hand with the oil on it, and watch what they do. They may drop their heads in your hand, try to lick the oil off your hand or rub their nose in your hand. For these responses you may apply [a] 3-4 drops to their nostrils, forehead, poll and chest. Use your intuition and watch for their responses.

This is a beautiful process that benefits both the animals and the person administering the oils. It is always amazing to see how essential oils can balance an animal physically and mentally, and the beauty is they know what they want. Nothing is forced on them, it is their decision. So make “scents” out of your weaning process and use essential oils.