

## **Maternal-Offspring Bond of Ponies Fed Different Amounts of Energy**

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*Abstract.* This work studied the effect of varying the caloric level of the maternal diet during lactation on the response of 23 mares (*Equus caballus*) and their suckling foals to separation. Pony mares were fed 9.33, 7.48, or 5.75 Mcal digestible energy/100 kg/day, which corresponded to 128, 103, or 79% of the national Research Council 1978 requirements, respectively. Foals were not allowed access to solid food and obtained all their nutrients from the dam's milk. The behavior of the mare in her home stall with the foal was compared with her behavior when the foal was removed for a 5-min period. Diet had no effect on the maternal response, even though the mares fed the low-energy diet lost weight and the other groups gained weight. Results show that due to separation the mare became less attached to the foal as it matured. Undernutrition had little effect on the mares' response to separation. Defecation, pawing, and snorting by the mare and foal increased during periods of separation. An unexpected finding was that a foal was not active in the absence of its mother during the first week of life.