

FEEDING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OBESE HORSES

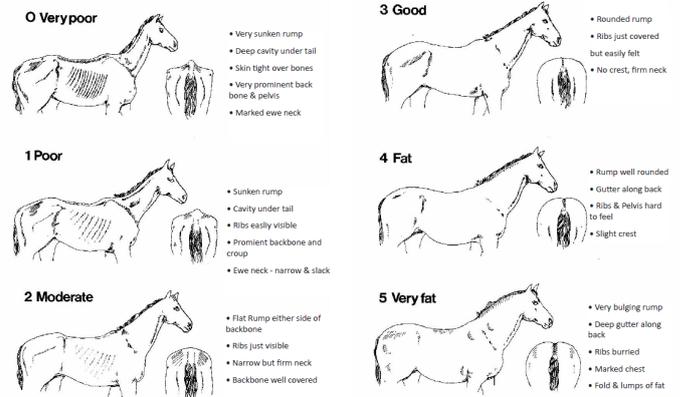
Overview

Avoiding obesity in horses and ponies through dietary management is always paramount, however in cases where obesity occurs, practices to decrease body condition are required. Obesity is a key risk factor for laminitis and insulin dysregulation.

Identify Obesity - Body Condition Scoring

Obese horses and ponies are classified as having body condition scores of 4 to 5 on the 0-5 Body Condition Score (BCS) scale.

- Areas of adiposity vary among individuals. Some will have an absence of palpable ribs, large fatty deposits behind the shoulder and tail head and a large firm crest. However, others may have palpable or even visible ribs leading some to describe them as 'lean', although retaining a large cresty neck or perhaps other hidden fat deposits.
- Size of neck crests can be another way to define level of obesity and therefore the horse's apparent risk of insulin dysregulation and laminitis.



Management

- Control pasture intake by either using a grazing muzzle or confining the horse to a yard, stable, small paddock or small area of the paddock.
- Implement a regular exercise horse program for the horse at a trot or faster pace. (Do not exercise the horse whilst lameness/laminitis is present).
- Offer low calorie hay; grass hay or straw are ideal and it is best to look for a late cut, mature stalky hay. Rain damaged grass hay may be suitable provided it is not mouldy. Avoid lucerne, clover or oaten hay.
- Ideally test the hay for energy content, nutrient composition and carbohydrate content.
- Soaking hay for 30 min in hot water or 60 min in cold water can reduce sugar and energy content.
- Offer 1-1.5% of the horse's bodyweight per day in small meals. For example, 6 kgs per day for a 400kg horse divided into 3-4 meals per day or fed using a slow release haynet or hay feeder.
- Lower intakes will result in faster weight loss, however minimum intakes must be maintained to avoid gastrointestinal problems. Avoid drastic intake reductions. Intakes can increase when acceptable weight is achieved.
- A low intake vitamin and mineral pellet or powder should be the only supplementary feed. **KER Gold Pellet** is an ideal supplement and is fed at 120g/500 kg B Wt. **KER Nutrequin** is also suitable.

Detailed diet advice based on the individual horse is an effective management tool for horses prone to obesity. Contact Milne Feeds' equine nutrition advisor, Michelle Meylan, on 0429 107 790 or pegasus@milne.com.au for dietary advice.

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Contact our WA based Equine Nutrition Advisor,
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