



Body condition scoring is used to evaluate a horse's general condition or fat cover. Body condition scoring enables you to keep an eye on your horse's weight over the changing annual seasons and can alert you to any change in condition which may indicate the need for a change in diet or an indication of disease. Using the 1-9 body condition scoring scale, a healthy, fit horse should maintain a body score of between 5 and 6.

What does body condition scoring involve?

Body scoring involves the careful examination of a horse in key body regions to determine what sort of bodily condition the horse is in, ie thin, average or obese. Using a body condition score scale can alert you to any small change in your horse's condition, which may indicate the need for a change in diet or an indication of disease. There are several popular body condition scoring scales used - the 1-5, 1-9 and 1-10 scales - this is a pity because a single easily understood method that allowed for subtle variations would help everyone to understand the scale. Whenever a body score is used the relevant scale should be mentioned to avoid any ambiguity.

Assessing your horse's body condition is quite simple. Take note of the following:

- If the ribs can only be felt by pressing hard or they cannot be felt at all, your horse is likely to be overweight.
- If the spinous processes along your horse's back cannot be felt and if there is a hollow along the middle, then your horse is probably overweight.
- Keep an eye out for fat deposits through the neck and the crest and along the rump and tail-head. Hard lumpy tissue in these areas is especially troublesome and is an indication of obesity as well as an indicator of risk for obesity-associated diseases such as laminitis.
- On the other extreme wherever you can easily feel any prominent bony processes, eg spine, ribs, tail-head, withers, shoulders, etc, it is likely that your horse is underweight and in poor condition.

Body score - 1

Poor condition

- Emaciated
- Prominent spinous processes, ribs, tail-head, hooks and pins
- Prominent withers, shoulders and neck
- No fatty tissue can be palpated

Body score - 2

Very thin

- Emaciated
- Slight fat covering over base of spinous processes
- Transverse processes of lumbar vertebrae feel rounded
- Withers, shoulders and neck faintly discernable

Body score - 3

Thin

- Fat built up about halfway on spinous processes, transverse processes cannot be felt
- Slight fat cover over ribs
- Spinous processes and ribs easily discernable
- Tail-head prominent, but individual vertebrae cannot be visually identified
- Hook bones appear rounded, but easily discernable
- Pin bones not distinguishable
- Withers, shoulders and neck accentuated

Body score - 4

Moderately thin

- Negative crease along back
- Faint outline of ribs visible

Body condition scoring



- Tail-head prominence depends on conformation; fat can be felt around it
- Hook bones not discernable
- Withers, shoulders and neck not obviously thin

Body score - 5

Moderate

- Flat back
- Ribs cannot be visually distinguished but can be easily felt
- Fat around tail-head beginning to feel spongy
- Withers appear rounded over spinous processes
- Shoulders and neck blend smoothly into body shape

Body score - 6

Moderate to fleshy

- May have slight crease along back
- Fat over ribs feels spongy
- Fat around tail-head feels soft
- Fat beginning to be deposited along the side of the withers, behind the shoulders and along the sides of the neck

Body score - 7

Fleshy

- May have crease along back
- Fat over ribs feels spongy
- Difficult to palpate ribs
- Area along withers filled with fat
- Area behind shoulder filled in flush
- Noticeable thickening of neck
- Fat deposited along inner buttocks

Body score - 8

Fat

- Crease along back
- Difficult to palpate ribs
- Fat around tail-head is very soft
- Area along withers filled with fat
- Area behind shoulder filled in flush
- Noticeable thickening of the neck
- Fat deposited along inner buttocks

Body score - 9

Extremely fat

- Obvious crease along back
- Patchy fat appearing over ribs
- Bulging fat around tail-head, along withers, behind shoulders and along neck
- Fat along inner buttocks may rub together
- Flank filled in flush

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your horse please contact Dalehead Veterinary Group on (01729) 823538 and we will be happy to advise you.