

Equine Body Scoring and Assessment of condition

Body scoring is the most reliable method of quick assessment on a horse or pony's condition. If you are unsure of your own or somebody else's horse's overall condition please read the following notes to get a good idea of what is acceptable condition and what is not.

Bear in mind that condition on the body score charts can vary from horse to horse and scores may be a result of work-load, illness, age, breed, or lactation. However it is safe to say that any horse or pony whose body weight falls below a score of 2 may well have their welfare compromised.

Often the mistake is made that a horse with a top body score of 2 or lower, with a large belly is still a 'fat' horse. This is not the case as much like a starving African child, a swollen or distended belly can be the sign of parasite infestation, irritated and/or damaged gut or in some cases possibly pregnancy. Any animal with a body score of 2 or lower, with a distended belly requires Veterinarian or possibly dental attention and correct feeding to prevent the animal dropping in condition thus risking its welfare.

If you are concerned for a horse or pony's welfare please feel free to print this information sheet to refer to when reporting a case to your local authorities, whether this be the Shire Ranger, Police, the RSPCA or Second Chance Horse Rescue. Having this information allows you to make a more accurate report as you can refer to the body scores and information provided which gives the person you speak to a much more accurate picture of the animal's health.

To remain healthy, a horse or pony requires feeding and enough fresh water as per their body weight and work-load. The following chart will give an indication of nutrition needed in order to maintain an acceptable body-weight. Please note, the following information is a base guideline only and to truly feed correctly, a great deal of research into available feeds and what an animal requires due to its weight, height, breed, work-load, and metabolism for each individual must be undertaken. Feeding horses and ponies correctly is an art, a science and must not be undertaken lightly.

**Basic Requirements As Outlined In - Code of Accepted Practice for the Welfare of Horses
Bureau of Animal Welfare, Attwood
October, 2001 (AG0005)**

(Full transcript of the code can be found at www.nre.vic.gov.au)

Water Requirements

The basic maintenance requirement of water for horses is about 52 ml/kg bodyweight/day

Ponies (200-300 kg body weight) require 10-15 litres daily.

Light hacks (300-450 kg body weight) require 15-25 litres daily.

Thoroughbreds (450-500 kg body weight) require 25-30 litres daily.

These requirements are increased with growth, work and lactation. Two or three times as much water as shown above is needed by horses in work. Water requirement is closely related to the dry matter intake of food. Horses need 2-4 litres of water per kilogram of dry matter intake.

This requirement increases as air temperatures rise (15-20% increase for 13°C to 25°C temperature change). Illness associated with bowel disease, such as obstructive colic or severe diarrhea, can result in substantial loss of water and other essential electrolytes (50 - 70 litres/day).

Water troughs and containers should be inspected for cleanliness and freedom from contamination, function and replenishment.

Food Requirements

Good quality pastures, containing suitable grasses and legumes, can provide the food requirements for most horses, except those doing hard work. In temperate areas where permanent pastures are fertilised annually, about one hectare of pasture for each grazing horse should provide maintenance requirements during years with normal rainfall.

Horses should be fed according to body condition. Over fatness is undesirable. The efficiency of food utilisation will vary between particular horses and breeds of horses. Most ponies utilise feed efficiently but thoroughbred horses require substantially more feed per kilogram of body weight. Most horses kept in smaller areas require supplementary feed for some part of the year, depending on requirements for growth, pregnancy, lactation, and work. Approximate minimum feed requirements of adult horses are shown in this table.

Approximate minimum feed requirements of adult horses.

Body weight of horse (kg)	Idle horse (maintenance only) (kg of hay*)	Moderate work (jumping, stock work, some evening); horse needs; both hay and grain.	
		(kg of hay*)	(kg of grain (oats))
300	5.0	4.0	1.0
400	7.0	5.0	3.5
500	8.0-9.0	5.5-7.5	4.0-6.0







*Good quality pasture hay rich in clover or Lucerne hay

Roughage – Horses and ponies are designed to graze approximately 20 hours out of every 24. The continuous flow of roughage such as a good pasture or good quality hay is essential for any horse in order to keep their digestive system operating properly and will prevent many health problems such as starvation, some forms of colic, indigestion etc.

Inexperienced people should consult a veterinarian, the Department of Agriculture, an Equine Nutritionist or an experienced horseman about selection of suitable foodstuffs for horses used for a particular purpose. Protein, mineral and vitamin supplements should be provided when required. Horses should have access to salt. Adequate, good quality food is necessary for growth of young horses. At six months of age horses require as much energy-rich foods and more protein than idle, adult horses. Lactating mares require about 70% more energy than idle, adult horses.

Equine Body Scoring

The following chart will give you a good indication as to a healthy appearance of a horse or pony. Please bear in mind, this chart is intended as a guideline only and if you are concerned that a horse or pony is unhealthy please consult the animal's owner and/or a veterinarian immediately.

<p>Score: 0 Very Poor</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very sunken rump • Deep cavity under tail • Skin tight over bones • Very prominent backbone & pelvis • Marked ewe neck <p>A horse in this condition is in very poor health. This is an UNACCEPTABLE condition for an animal to be in and a horse or pony in this condition requires immediate veterinarian attention. Horses and ponies in this condition have a low chance of survival due to the damage caused to their bodies from prolonged illness/starvation.</p>
<p>Score: 1 Poor</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunken rump • Cavity under tail • Ribs easily visible • Prominent backbone and croup • Ewe neck - narrow and slack <p>A horse in this condition is in poor health. This is an UNACCEPTABLE condition for an animal to be in and a horse or pony in this condition requires immediate veterinarian attention. Horses and ponies in this condition have a good chance of survival depending on their overall health.</p>
<p>Score: 2 Moderate</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flat rump either side of backbone • Ribs just visible • Narrow but firm neck • Backbone well covered <p>A horse or pony in this condition would be borderline. Often illness can cause a horse to drop weight to this level and may not necessarily be neglect. In many cases, as horses reach old age, their condition can deteriorate to this level as their muscle tone drops away and metabolism changes. Old age is NO excuse for a horse to be in poor condition and it is up to their owners to provide proper care for their aging animals.</p>
<p>Score: 3 Good</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rounded rump • Ribs just covered but easily felt • No crest, firm neck <p>A horse with a Body Score of 3 is in good condition. Often owners like to see their horses looking fat (see Score 4) as an indication of good health however horses that are fit and in performance condition have this score. Race-horses, Eventers, Showjumpers and Endurance horses will not carry excess body fat therefore will not look fat. These animals are well muscled and fit for the work they are conditioned for.</p>
<p>Score: 4 Fat</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rump well rounded • Gutter along back • Ribs and pelvis hard to feel • Slight crest <p>A fat horse or pony may be not in work, and at most horse studs, breeding mares will be kept at a body score of 4 to ensure they have enough condition on them to sustain raising a foal. Often show horses and ponies will be kept at this level to give them the well-fed and content look for the show ring.</p>
<p>Score: 5 Very Fat</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very bulging rump • Deep gutter along back • Ribs buried • Marked crest • Folds and lumps of fat <p>A very fat horse or pony, just like in humans, are at risk of weight-related issues. Horses and especially ponies can suffer from conditions such as laminitis, or founder, or sometimes organ failure if they are obese and/or being fed rich or high protein foods that do not compensate for a workload.</p>