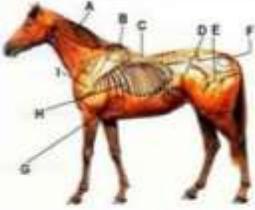


Fall Horse Health Reminders

Check your horses' **body condition** to assess the need for adjustments in their nutritional intake to prepare for the coming stress of winter. It's much easier for them to gain weight *before* the weather becomes harsh. Use the standardized Henneke Body Condition Scoring System to assess your horse's body condition (available on our SBCH Website Education page: [Body Condition Scoring Horses: Step-by-Step](#) and [Horse Body Condition Scoring](#) Video). Learn how to check your horse in six areas: neck, withers, shoulder, ribs, loin, and tailhead to see how his condition rates on a scale from 1 to 9. Ideally, horses should be a 5, meaning when you look at your horse you can't see his ribs, but you can easily feel them. His topline should be level and you shouldn't see a peaked spine. If you live in an area that has harsh winters, horses going into winter with of a rating of 6 is OK, but horses scoring a 4 should probably gain a little more weight.



BODY CONDITION SCORING CHART



Areas of Emphasis for Body Condition Scoring

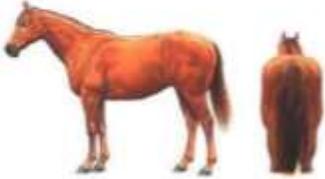
- A: Thickening of the neck
- B: Fat covering the withers
- C: Fat deposits along backbone
- D: Fat deposit on flanks
- E: Fat deposits on inner thigh
- F: Fat deposits around tailhead
- G: Fat deposit behind shoulder
- H: Fat covering ribs
- I: Shoulder blends into neck

5 Moderate
Back is flat (no crease or ridge); ribs not visually distinguishable but easily felt; fat around tailhead beginning to feel spongy; withers appear rounded; over spinous processes; shoulders and neck blend smoothly into body.



1 Poor
Animal extremely emaciated; spinous processes, ribs, tailhead, tuber coxae, and tuber ischi projecting prominently; bone structure of withers, shoulders, and neck easily noticeable; no fatty tissue can be felt.

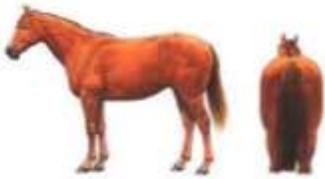
6 Moderately Fleishy
May have slight crease down back; fat over ribs fleshy/spongy; fat around tailhead soft; fat beginning to be deposited along sides of withers, behind shoulders, and along sides of neck.



2 Very Thin
Animal emaciated; slight fat covering over base of spinous processes; transverse processes of lumbar vertebrae feel rounded; spinous processes, ribs, tailhead, tuber coxae, and tuber ischi prominent; withers, shoulders, and neck structure faintly discernible.



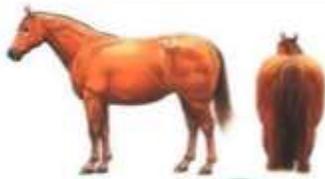
7 Fleishy
May have crease down back; individual ribs can be felt, but noticeable filling between ribs with fat; fat around tailhead soft; fat deposited along withers, behind shoulders, and along neck.



3 Thin
Fat buildup about halfway on spinous processes; transverse processes cannot be felt; slight fat cover over ribs; spinous processes and ribs easily discernible; tailhead prominent, but individual vertebrae cannot be identified visually; tuber coxae appear rounded but easily discernible; tuber ischi not distinguishable; withers, shoulders, and neck accentuated.



8 Fat
Crease down back; difficult to feel ribs; fat around tailhead very soft; area along withers filled with fat; area behind shoulder filled with fat; noticeable thickening of neck; fat deposited along inner thighs.



4 Moderately Thin
Slight ridge along back; faint outline of ribs discernible; tailhead prominence depends on conformation, fat can be felt around it; tuber coxae not discernible; withers, shoulders, and neck not obviously thin.



9 Extremely Fat
Obvious crease down back; patchy fat appearing.





ASSURANCE
Equine to Equine Nutrition

Henneke et al., 1983

Illustrations by Japan Racing Association

Horses naturally burn calories to keep warm. To help senior horses and hard-keepers gain a few extra pounds, start by substituting some of your horse's grass hay for alfalfa. Alfalfa's higher calorie and protein content encourages weight gain and muscle development in working horses. Also consider feeding your horse beet pulp, which is high in readily available fiber that provides a good source of calories without adding a lot of starch or sugar.

On the other hand, winter can help overweight horses lose extra pounds with controlled feeding. Be sure to monitor all your horses' body score and weight throughout fall and winter by using your hands to assess their condition, since winter hair can be visually deceiving.

Use caution with **fall grass**; cool, fall nights lead to increased accumulation of sugars in grass due to slower growth. The shifting carbohydrate levels in grasses can cause gastric upset in some horses and actual founder in others. Be careful not to turn susceptible horses out on frozen grass during the fall, and wait till the sun melts the frost away before turning out. If a hard frost occurs, interrupting fall growth, grasses may retain higher sugar levels. Consider restricting grass intake for easy-keepers and other founder-prone



horses to prevent **fall laminitis**. Insulin-resistant horses, or older horses that may have early Cushing's disease, are at high risk for laminitis in the fall. Recent research has found that there is a seasonal elevation of the hormone ACTH in all horses during the fall. This begins mid- to late August and continues into November. For normal horses, it's not a problem, but with insulin-resistant horses, or those with early Cushing's, the rise in ACTH can be substantially greater and the increases in cortisol this produces puts them at high risk for laminitis. In fact, for many older horses a bout of fall laminitis is often what leads to the initial diagnosis of Cushing's disease.

Colder weather makes cold **drinking water** less appealing. A decreased water intake can lead to *dehydration and colic*; be sure your horse has access to ice-free water at all times. Install and check tank heaters to ensure they are in good working order and that power cords are in good condition and inaccessible to your horses. Insulate pipes if necessary.

Fall deworming with a good broad-spectrum dewormer is important after the **first hard frost** to ensure your horse will be able to better utilize his feed and maintain body condition before and during winter. By fall, the worm eggs and larvae ingested during spring and summer have matured and are living in the digestive tract, unless you have maintained a good deworming schedule.

Have your **horse's teeth** checked for any tooth problems, and to ensure maximum comfort and feed efficiency. This is a good time for sheath cleaning as well.

Maintain good **hoof care** with regular trimming and inspection and pull shoes when your riding season ends for the winter. Even though you may not be riding in cold weather, your horse's feet will need regular maintenance.

Prevent freezing and thawing of fly sprays, medicines and other liquids by taking them into a climate-controlled location to preserve their efficacy.

Inspect your **barn, feeders and fences** for damage, and make repairs as needed before the weather keeps you indoors. Ensure no hazards exist to injure your horse, especially as the temptation increases to reach over or through fences for tastier forage. Be especially vigilant if you share fences with neighboring horses which may interact with yours.

