

Fat Score Chart for Horses and Ponies

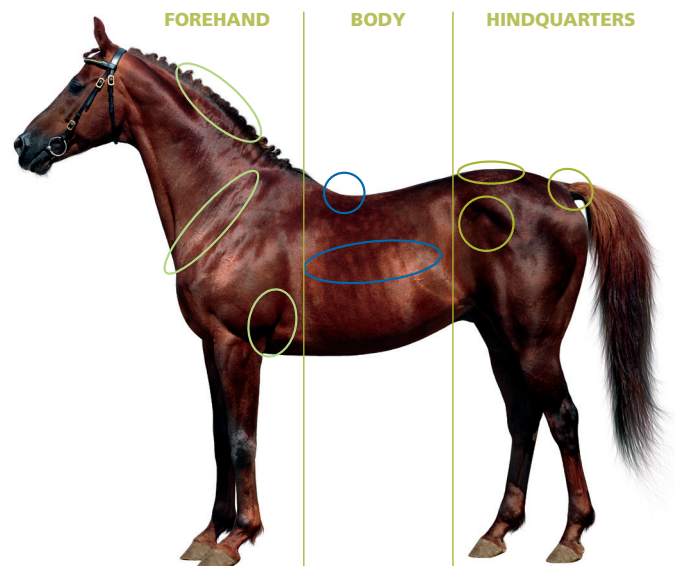
Maintaining horses and ponies at a healthy body weight is important for promoting good general health and in preventing illness and injury. Excess fat stores increase the strain placed on the locomotory, circulatory and respiratory systems, with a common consequence of excess weight being reduced performance ability.

Inadequate fat stores have fewer obvious consequences, however a lack of fat reserve is deleterious in times of illness and during sustained exercise when internal energy reserves must be utilised. In performance horses a lack of internal energy reserve can lead to the onset of premature fatigue.

Recognising when our horses are over or underweight is important as it allows dietary adjustments to be made. Fat scoring assesses the horse's fat stores and can be performed by all owners as no equipment is needed. Fat scoring should be performed once a month, ideally around the same date each month.

How to Fat Score:

1. Fat scoring is performed from the point of shoulder and point of buttock upwards, allowing pregnant mares to be scored as their extended belly area does not affect the score.
2. The horse's body is split into three sections; the **forehand** comprising of the neck and shoulder, the **body** comprising of the back and ribs and the **hindquarters** comprising of the hips and rump.
3. Each section is given a score based on the amount of fat stored at specific points of the body (shown by the circles). Each point is felt and scored on a scale of 0 to 5, with half scores also being acceptable.
4. Give each area a score and then average the scores for an overall fat score.



0 Emaciated

No underlying fat and skeletal structures are clearly visible.



FOREHAND

Marked 'ewe' neck, narrow and slack at base with prominent, easily visible shoulder blade.

BODY

Skin tight over ribs, ribs very visible. Spinous processes sharp and easily seen.

HINDQUARTERS

Angular pelvis with prominent hip bones. Very sunken quarters with deep cavity under tail and either side of spine.

1 Poor



FOREHAND

'Ewe' neck, narrow and slack with prominent shoulder blade.

BODY

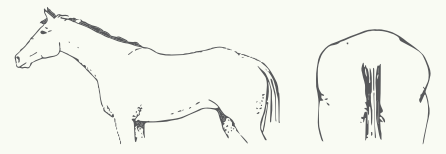
Ribs easily visible, skin sunken either side of backbone. Spinous processes well defined.

HINDQUARTERS

Quarters sunken with prominent pelvis, hips and spine.

2 Moderate

A fit racehorse should carry this amount of fat.



FOREHAND

Narrow but firm.

BODY

Ribs just visible, backbone well covered but spinous processes easily felt.

HINDQUARTERS

Quarters flat either side of backbone with some fat. Hips and tail head easily felt and slight cavity under tail.

3 Ideal

Most leisure horses will carry this amount of fat.



FOREHAND

No crest (except stallions), firm neck with shoulder blade easily felt.

BODY

Ribs just covered and easily felt. Spinous processes palpable.

HINDQUARTERS

Quarters covered with palpable layer of soft fat. Point of hip easily felt.

4 Fat



FOREHAND

Neck is wide and firm with a slight crest. Shoulder blade not visible and some fat behind the elbow.

BODY

Ribs difficult to feel. Fat either side of the spine creating a gutter.

HINDQUARTERS

Quarters well covered with layer of fat. Spinous processes not palpable with gutter along spine and tail head. Slight apple shape from behind.

5 Obese



FOREHAND

Wide firm neck with prominent crest. Shoulder blade difficult to feel. Fat behind the elbow.

BODY

Ribs cannot be felt due to layer of fat. May have visible fat pads. Broad, flat back with gutter along spine.

HINDQUARTERS

Quarters covered by firm layer of fat with deep gutter along spine. Apple shaped from behind.

Adapted from: Carroll, C.L., & Huntington, P.J. (1988). Body condition scoring and weight estimation in horses. *Equine Veterinary Journal*, 20: 41-45.