

EQUINE

BODY CONDITION SCORING

Score 4 - Moderately Thin

Faint outline of ribs visible



Score 5 - Moderate

Back flat, ribs not visible



Score 6 - Moderately Fleshy

Crease down back, fat over ribs



Score 3 - Thin

Slight fat cover over ribs



Utah State University

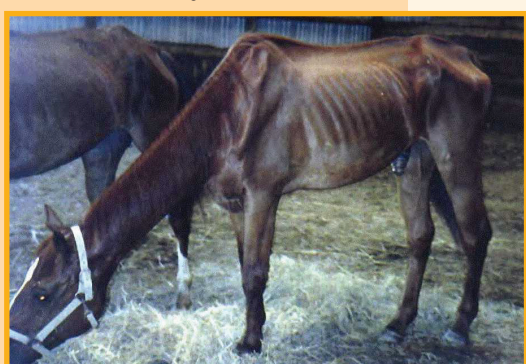
Score 2 - Very Thin

Slight fat covering over spinous processes



Score 1 - Poor

Animal extremely emaciated



KEY REFERENCE POINTS



- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| A – Point of buttock | E – Withers |
| B – Tailhead | F – Crest |
| C – Point of hip | G – Behind shoulder |
| D – Crease of back | H – Ribs |

Score 7 - Fleshy

Fat around tailhead, withers, shoulders



Score 8 - Fat

Crease down back, difficult to feel ribs



Score 9 - Extremely Fat

Crease down back, flanks and inner thighs fatty



INDIANA 4-H
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

All horse owners should know where their horses score relative to body condition. Because the ideal body condition is subjective, body condition scoring has been developed to provide basic guidelines for evaluating a horse's condition. A combination of visual appraisal and manual appraisal (feel) are used to estimate body condition.

Body condition scores ranging from five to six (moderate to moderately fleshy) are preferred for most horses. However, the activity level of the horse should be considered. Body condition scores of less than four or greater than six may lead to increased metabolic or nutritional disease, and may have a negative impact on the horse's general welfare.

Resources

Indiana Board of Animal Health,
Livestock Care and Assistance Helpline:
(877) 747-3038, ext. 370 (toll-free)

Purdue University Large Animal Hospital:
(765) 494-8548

PURDUE
EXTENSION

1-888-EXT-INFO

LOCAL FACES
COUNTLESS CONNECTIONS

www.extension.purdue.edu

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EQUINE

BODY CONDITION SCORING

The information on the front and the back of this poster will help you determine the general health and well-being of a horse. For most horses, body condition score should be between five and six for maximum health, with some variation based on activity. Body condition scores of less than four or greater than six may lead to increased metabolic or nutritional disease, and may have a negative impact on the horse’s general welfare.

Body Condition Scores:

Please refer to the front of this poster for photos of each condition score.

Score 1: Poor

Animal is extremely emaciated. Spinous processes, ribs, tailhead, hip joints, and lower pelvic bones project prominently. Bone structure of withers, shoulder, and neck are easily noticeable, and no fatty tissue can be felt.

Score 2: Very Thin

Animal is emaciated, with a slight fat covering over the base of spinous processes. Transverse processes of lumbar vertebrae feel rounded. Spinous processes, ribs, tailhead, hip joints, and lower pelvic bones are prominent. Withers, shoulder, and neck structure are faintly discernible.

Score 3: Thin

Fat buildup about halfway on spinous processes. Transverse processes cannot be felt, but spinous processes and ribs are easily visible. There is a slight fat cover over the ribs. The tailhead is prominent, but individual vertebrae cannot be identified visually. Hip joints appear rounded but easily visible. Lower pelvic bones are not distinguishable. The withers, shoulders, and neck are accentuated.

Score 4: Moderately Thin

Slight ride along the back, and a faint outline of the ribs is visible. Tailhead prominence depends on the horse’s individual conformation, but fat can be felt around it. Hip joints are not visible, and the withers, shoulder, and neck are not obviously thin.

Score 5: Moderate

Back is flat and the ribs are not visually distinguishable but can be felt easily. Fat around the tailhead feels spongy. Withers appear rounded over the spinous processes, and the shoulders and neck blend smoothly into the body.

Score 6: Moderately Fleshy

The horse may have a crease down the back. Spongy fat can be felt over the ribs, and fat over the tailhead is soft. Fat deposits are developing along side of the withers, behind the shoulders, and along the crest of the neck.

Score 7: Fleshy

The horse may have a crease down the back. Individual ribs can be felt, but there is noticeable filling between the ribs with fat. Fat around the tailhead is soft, and fat is deposited along the withers, behind the shoulders, and along the crest of the neck.

Score 8: Fat

The horse has a crease down the back. It is difficult to feel the ribs. Fat around the tailhead is very soft. Areas along the withers and behind the shoulders are filled with fat, and there is noticeable thickening of the neck. Fat is deposited along the inner thighs.

Score 9: Extremely Fat

There is an obvious crease down the back. Patchy fat appears over the ribs. There are bulging fat deposits around the tailhead, along the withers, behind the shoulders, and along the neck. Fat deposits along the inner thighs may rub together, and the flank is filled with fat.

Other Signs of Good Health

In addition to body fat cover, there are other signs that can help determine the health status of horses.

Hair Coat: A shiny, glossy hair coat is one of the best indicators of a healthy horse. Hair coat quality is reflective of good nutrition and health.

Hoof Growth: Normal-health horses have healthy hoof wall tissue. The wall should grow at a rate of ¼ – ½ inch per month. The hoof should be smooth and have no cracks. It should form a straight line with the front of the pastern when viewed from the side.

Eyes: The eyes should be bright, fully open, and clear, without discharge or a dull, glazed appearance.

Hydration: The water balance of a horse is vital to health. A skin fold test can be done by pinching a fold of skin on the neck, pulling it out, and recording the number of seconds the skin takes to return to its normal position. Less than one second is normal.

Manure/Urine: Horses normally have firm manure balls that are brown to greenish brown in color. Normal urine is wheat straw colored and clear. Manure that is loose or watery, or stool that contains undigested grain, or urine that is cloudy or discolored may indicate a health problem.

Mucous Membrane Color: The membranes of the horse’s gums and lips should be a healthy pink color. Pale, white, yellow, or deep purple colors are all cause for concern.

Capillary Refill: The circulation of a horse can be assessed by gently pressing the thumb against the gums of the horse and releasing. Count the number of seconds it takes for the color to return to the gum. Less than three seconds is normal.

Heart Rate: The normal heart rate of a resting adult horse is 32–48 beats per minute. This may be measured with a stethoscope or by taking the horse’s pulse. Age of the horse, temperature, humidity, exercise, and excitement can all affect the heart rate.

Respiratory Rate: The normal respiratory rate of a resting adult horse is 8–16 breaths per minute. This may be measured by observing inhaling or exhaling of the flanks, or by counting breaths from the nostrils.

Temperature: The normal body temperature of a horse is 98–101°F. Temperature is measured by using a rectal thermometer. Temperature can be increased by high environmental temperature, exercise, or dehydration.

References

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Henneke, D.R., G.D. Potter, J.L. Kreider, and B.F. Yeates. 1988. Relationship between condition score, physical measurement, and body fat percentage in mares. *Equine Veterinary Journal* 15: 371–72.

Horse Industry Handbook: A Guide to Equine Care and Management. 2007. American Youth Horse Council.