

Don't settle for anything less than Ideal: Consequences of being Too Fat



EQUINE GUELPH
helping horses for life

Obesity is a rising health concern

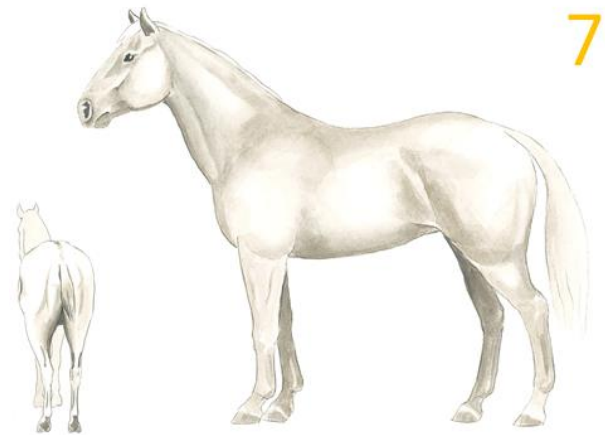
23% - 51% of horses are reported to be overweight or obese¹⁻⁵. Since owners can sometimes underestimate a horse's body condition score^{4,5}, obesity rates may be even higher. Obesity is associated with many negative health consequences. Take a preventive stance against obesity by reviewing the Henneke Body Condition Score⁶ (BCS) system, and using it on a regular basis. Equine Guelph has developed a [barn poster](#) to help horse owners keep accurate track of their horses BCS.

What is an overweight or obese horse?

- Overweight and obese horses are those with body condition scores of greater than 7 on the Henneke BCS system
- A score of 7 may be too high for some horses (e.g. athletic horses), but acceptable for others (e.g. a broodmare going into winter)

Risk factors

- Certain breeds, such as pony breeds⁵
- Overfeeding
- Primary use⁷
 - Pleasure riding or non-ridden horses are more likely to be obese than competition horses
- Easy keepers⁷
- Summer season⁸
- Dominant position in the herd⁹
- Blanketing



Consequences¹⁰

- Exercise intolerance
 - Longer post-exercise recovery time
- Less effective at thermoregulation
- Decreased reproductive performance
 - Altered estrous cycles
 - Changes to the follicle and oocyte¹¹
 - Problems with follicle development and oocyte release
- Benign lipomas, which can cause obstructions in the digestive tract
- Increased production of inflammatory molecules in the body

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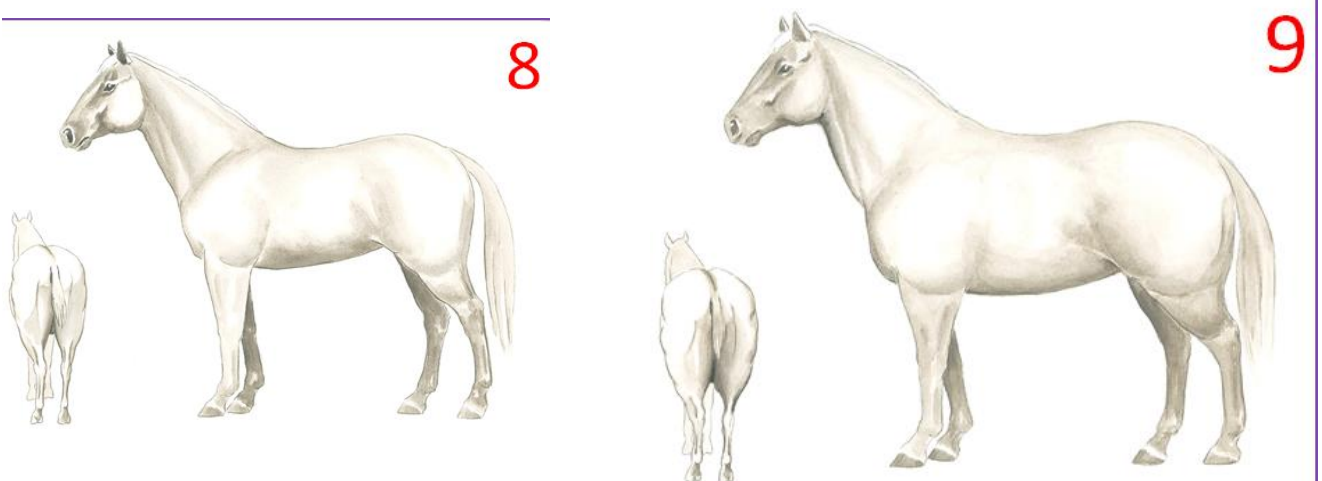


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- Altered metabolism¹² (e.g. insulin resistance), resulting in increased risk of:
 - Equine Metabolic Syndrome
 - Laminitis
 - Pituitary Pars Intermedia Dysfunction
 - Osteoarthritis and osteochondrosis
 - Hyperlipidemia and hepatic lipidosis
 - Diabetes mellitus
 - Systemic inflammation

Management tips

- Schedule a veterinary visit to address any underlying causes
- Consult with veterinarian and/or equine nutritionist to develop a weight loss plan, which may involve restricting feed intake (especially through pasture) and/or eliminating concentrate feed the horse is receiving
- Reducing weight by starvation is not viable or lawful. Consequences are dire.
- Provide free access to water and loose salt. A good quality forage balancer is essential when restricting feed.
- Increase the amount of exercise
- Prevent boredom between meals by:
 - Hay nets and slow feeders to increase time spent foraging
 - Divide forage in piles to encourage movement
 - Provide a play ball with a small handful of high-fibre pellets between feedings. This feed should be included as part of the horse's calculated feed allowance for the day.



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Sources

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