



DODSON & HORRELL

ANIMAL HEALTH, NUTRITION AND WELL-BEING

FEEDING SUCCESS

FEEDING THE GOOD DOER

All you need to know

Helping some horses and ponies to lose weight can feel impossible! Research shows that over 50% of leisure horses in the UK are overweight or obese, which increases the risk of problems such as Laminitis or Equine Metabolic Syndrome.

Putting your horse or pony on a diet can be difficult. Our Nutritional Advisors or your vet can advise you on the best way to help your horse or pony lose weight.

Is your horse overweight?

- It is important to regularly assess whether your horse is at the correct weight for their height and breed
- We recommend measuring your horse using a scientifically validated weigh tape every fortnight
- You should also fat score your horse every fortnight. Ideally you should aim for a fat score of between 2.5 and 3. Look at our Right Weight Leaflet for more information on how to fat score your horse or pony
- Look out for regional fat deposits, particularly a cresty neck, fat pads behind the shoulder or fat filled eye sockets
- These may indicate an increased risk of Equine Metabolic Syndrome and Laminitis

Set a Weight Loss Goal

- Once you have measured your horse or pony's weight then you can estimate how much weight they need to lose
- An obese horse (more than 20% overweight) could healthily lose 1% of bodyweight every two weeks
 - A 13hh pony weighing 420kg could lose 4.2kg every fortnight
- It is important to monitor weight loss by weighing and fat scoring your horse every two weeks
- Taking photos regularly can help you to visualise changes in your horse or pony's body condition



Call us now for expert nutritional advice: 01270 782223

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Recommended Products: Go Lite Balancer, Equi-Bites and Daily Vitamins and Minerals

Don't Starve your Horse or Pony:

- Horses are trickle feeders and evolved to spend most of their time eating. This is important for both their physical and mental wellbeing
- We normally recommend that horses receive between 2 and 2.5% of their bodyweight per day in forage
- For obese horses this may need to be restricted to 1.5 to 2% of their bodyweight
- This should only be done under veterinary supervision as severe feed restriction can result in behavioural and health problems such as stereotypies, gastric ulcers, colic or a life-threatening condition called hyperlipaemia

Limit Grazing:

- Grass is a major source of calories - some horses can eat 5% of their bodyweight in grass per day (dry matter), gaining 21kg in a week
- Restricting turnout may not be enough, horses may adapt to this by eating more in a shorter period
- You could consider using a grazing muzzle which can lower grass intake by as much as 83%
- Other methods of reducing grass intake include strip grazing, cutting the grass, or increasing the number of horses
- If your horse is very overweight turnout on an all-weather surface with access to soaked hay or straw could be beneficial

Feed Low Calorie Forage:

- As overweight horses still need plenty of forage in their diet it is important to feed a low calorie forage
- Soaking the hay for 12 hours, ideally in warm water, can reduce the calorie content
- Another option is to mix hay with lower calorie oat or barley straw
- Haylage is not normally recommended for overweight horses or ponies as it is typically more digestible than hay or straw

Top Tip!

Spread your horse's meals and forage out as much as possible over the day, including a late evening feed. This will help to reduce boredom and promote healthy hindgut function.

Feed a Balancer or a Vitamin and Mineral Supplement:

- Many overweight horses are actually undernourished and are not fed a diet balanced in vitamins and minerals, which can lead to problems such as poor hoof quality
- Overweight horses and ponies do not need large amounts of concentrate feed, but there are a few ways to make sure they are receiving all the nutrients that they require:
 - Our Go Lite Balancer is a high specification balancer formulated for horses in need of a calorie controlled diet and those prone to laminitis
 - Daily Vitamin and Mineral top up provide a vitamin and mineral 'top-up' for leisure horses and ponies
 - Equi-Bites are fully supplemented vitamin and mineral treats
- These will provide them with all the essential vitamins and minerals they need, whilst helping to limit calorie intake

Exercise Daily:

- Exercise is really important for weight loss as it utilises energy and stimulates your horse's metabolism
- A good starting point is 30 minutes of brisk walking per day, gradually increasing this as your horse's fitness improved
- Having a realistic goal, such as a sponsored ride or local show, can be really helpful
- Lunging is a great way to burn off calories if you do not have time to ride everyday
- You can also encourage exercise in the paddock, forming a u-shape from electric fence with the water at one end and the gate at the other often works well
- Your horse will feel lazy to begin with but as they lose weight and become fitter their activity levels will increase

Don't Over-Rug:

- Winter can be a good time to kick start weight loss in horses and ponies who have gained weight over the spring and summer
 - Using a lighter weight rug or giving them a belly clip will mean that they will burn off some of their excess weight keeping warm

Please visit our website, get in touch via social media or call: **01270 782223**

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