



**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**

# FEEDING THE GOOD DOER

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**

dodsonandhorrell.com    

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