

How to Fat Score

Watch our video on how to fat score your horse on our website now!

You can't effectively fat-score a horse just by looking – you need to feel for the fat cover in certain areas. Give your horse one score out of five for their neck and shoulder, one for their back/barrel and one for their hindquarters, then take an average. Horses store fat in different areas, so an average of these scores will produce a more accurate assessment, as well as highlighting potential danger areas.

Half scores are allowed e.g., 3.5/5 as some horses may have fat coverage between two scores.

1



1. Start on the top of your horses' neck

Feel along the top of your horse's neck – **can you wobble the top of it (fat), or is it fairly firm (muscle)?** It's important to note that a significant fatty crest can go solid, so make sure that isn't the cause of any firmness – fat is deposited along the top of the neck (the crest), whereas muscle develops in the middle-lower sections of the neck.

Feel if it is significantly thicker along the top of the neck (the crest) as you move down from the poll towards the withers, as this is likely to be a buildup of fat.

2



2. Move down the neck and onto their shoulder

Run your hand down your horse's neck and onto their shoulder. **If fat has built up in front of the shoulder blades, your hand will run from the neck to the shoulder without the shoulder blade 'stopping' your hand.** Look at the body fat guide and score your horse out of five for their neck and shoulder.

3

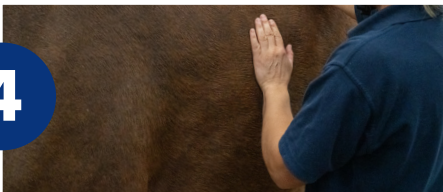


3. Feel across their back

Relax your hand, palm down, across your horse's back. **Ideally, your hand should arch over the spine, making a sideways 'C' shape.** When horses put weight on in this area, the fat builds up on either side of the spine, causing a flat hand.

Notes: In the UK, native breeds often store excess fat in 'pads' behind their shoulders, so keep an eye out for this and allow for it in the score you give. Horses with hormonal disorders such as Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS) may also develop fat pads or pockets in areas that do not typically store fat. Horses don't store much fat on their underbellies and 'hay bellies' are often mistaken as fat. Hay bellies are typically a full intestinal tract and should not be scored. Instead, imagine a horizontal line the same height as the point of the shoulder and score the horse purely on areas above that line.

4

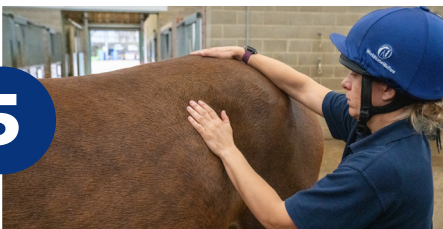


4. Run your hand along your horse's barrel

Run your fingers along your horse's side. You should be able to feel their ribs fairly easily using moderate pressure.

Again, give your horse a score out of five for their back and middle.

5



5. Finish fat scoring on your horse's hindquarters

Feel for the hip bones and pelvis, and check for a buildup of fat around the base of the tail. Again, it should be possible to feel the structures of the skeleton using moderate pressure, and there should be no notable fat deposits around the base of the tail.

Give a score out of five for the hindquarters.

Once you have all three scores, add them together and divide by three to find your horse's average overall fat score. Use the chart on the back of this leaflet to keep a record.

Q: Is this fat that I'm feeling on my horse, or muscle?

A: A simple way to tell the difference is that fat is soft and wobbles, whereas muscle is harder and firm. Horses that are elderly or not in work naturally have less muscle mass and definition, so may look like they have a lower fat score even when they don't. This is why it is important to feel for fat cover, rather than just looking.



Neck/Shoulder Fat Scores

0

0.5

1

1.5

2

2.5

3

3.5

4

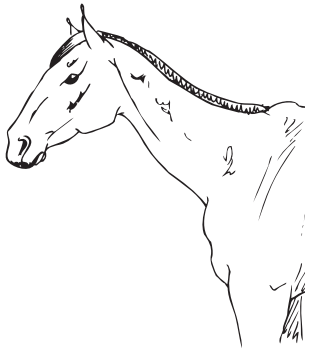
4.5

5

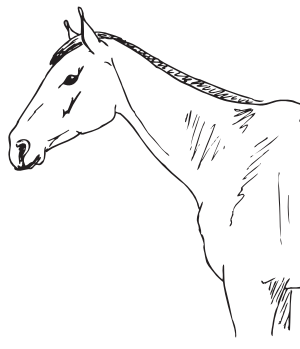
Not enough fat

The right amount of fat

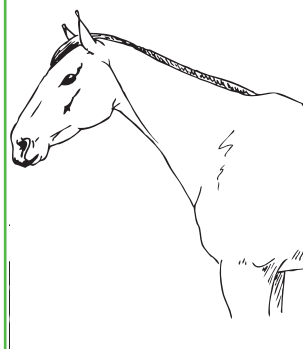
Too much fat



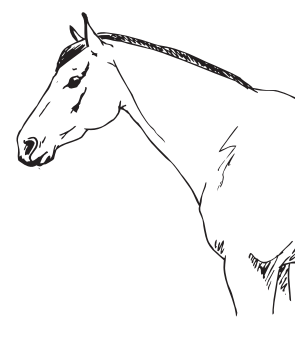
- Neck is very narrow, slack at base
- Prominent dip before wither – ewe necked
- Shoulder blades very prominent with no fat cover



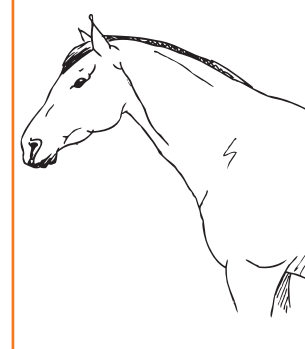
- Neck is narrow, slack at base
- Slight dip before wither – ewe necked
- Shoulder blades prominent with little/no fat cover



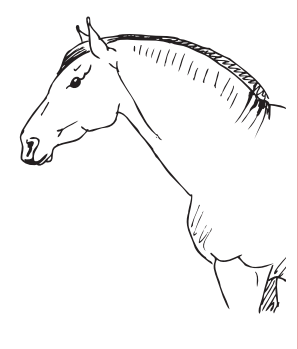
- Neck narrow but firm
- Shoulder blade clearly defined



- Firm neck
- No crest (except stallions)
- Shoulder blades defined



- Slight crest on neck, wide and spongy
- Fat pad in front, behind or covering shoulder blades



- Marked crest, very wide and firm, creases of fat
- Shoulder blade buried and difficult to feel



Back/Barrel Fat Scores

0

0.5

1

1.5

2

2.5

3

3.5

4

4.5

5

Not enough fat

The right amount of fat

Too much fat

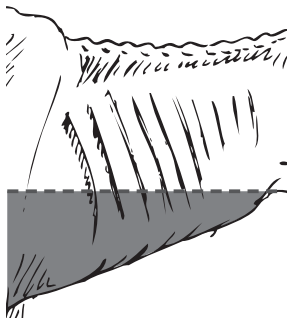
Hand makes an upside down 'v' over back



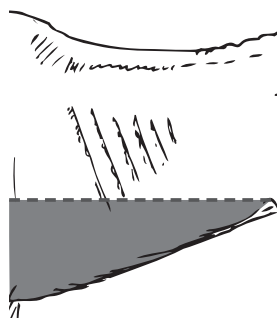
Hand makes a sideways 'c' over back



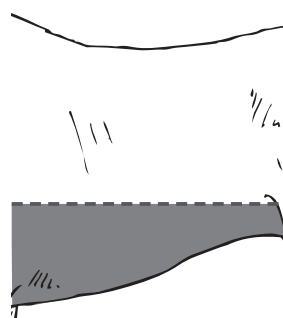
Hand is flat on back



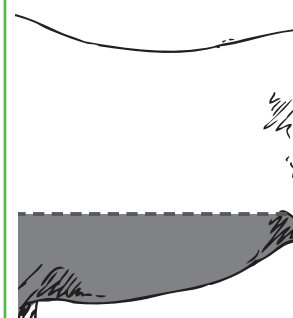
- The skin is tight over the ribs, which are very prominent
- Spine feels sharp and vertebrae easily felt



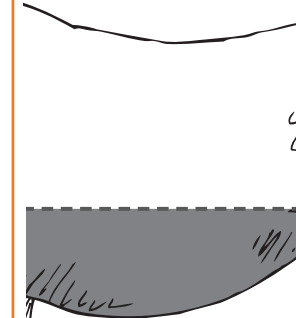
- Ribs easily felt
- Skin shrunken either side of spine
- Top of vertebrae well defined



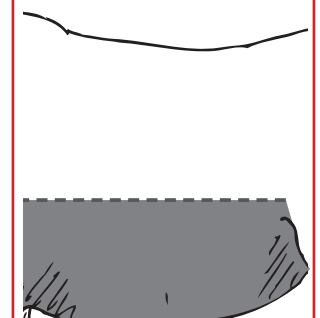
- Ribs can be felt
- Spine well covered
- Vertebrae can be felt but not seen



- Ribs just covered, easily felt
- No gutter along back
- Vertebrae well covered but can be felt



- Ribs well covered and not easy to feel
- Fat stored either side of the spine to form gutter along the spine to the root of the tail



- Ribs buried, cannot be felt
- Deep gutter along spine, back broad and flat



Score the horse only using areas of the body that are above the grey section.

Hindquarters Fat Scores

0

0.5

1

1.5

2

2.5

3

3.5

4

4.5

5

Not enough fat

The right amount of fat

Too much fat



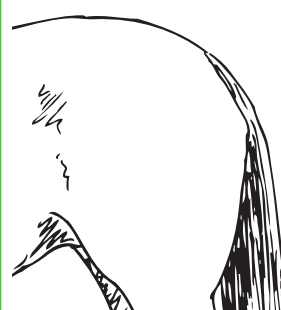
- Angular pelvis, tight skin, very sunken rump
- Deep cavity under tail and either side of croup



- Rump sunken but skin supple
- Pelvis and croup well defined, cavity under tail



- Rump flat either side of spine
- Croup well defined, some fat
- Slight cavity under tail



- Pelvis covered by fat and rounded
- No gutter
- Pelvis easily felt



- Fat pads over pelvis create gutter from croup to tail
- Pelvis covered, felt only with firm pressure



- Significant fat pads over pelvis create pronounced gutter from croup to tail
- Skin distended
- Pelvis buried, cannot be felt



Fat Scoring Record

| Date | Neck/shoulder fat score (out of 5) | Back/barrel fat score (out of 5) | Hindquarters fat score (out of 5) | Average fat score (out of 5) | Comments (e.g., not enough/ too much/the right amount of fat, neck is the danger area, etc.) |
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Not enough fat
- review diet and
management to
increase calorie
content as
required.

**The right
amount of fat**
– keep diet and
management as
they are.

Too much fat –
review diet to
remove excess
calories and
increase exercise
as required.