



The Ideal Condition

Every horse is an individual with no two horses being exactly alike in size, shape and type with their breeding, history and management all influencing body condition. The ideal condition is measured by considering the horses body condition together with the amount of work or how "fit" a horse is. So for example a competitive endurance horse is usually leaner than a show-fit horse.

Why do horses lose weight?

Weight loss can be attributed to a number of factors, living environment, age, breed/genetics and feed. Poor worming regimes, a stressful environment and poor dentition where a horse is unable to digest his food properly all play a part. It is vital that your horse is able to utilise his feed correctly in order to encourage better digestion within the hindgut.

Using a weigh tape to monitor your horses weight weekly is a good idea to allow you to identify any changes in condition early on so that any action can be taken quickly. Once you are confident that your horse is in good health you can then start to look at your horses feeding regime.

Horses lose weight for a variety of reasons, medical and non-medical. If you are worried about your horses weight loss you should contact your veterinarian.

Feeding for Weight Gain

When feeding a horse for weight gain it is important to allow the horse access to ad-lib forage as horses should eat up to 2.5% of their bodyweight daily in order to keep their digestive system healthy. This means your horse should have unlimited access to fibre such as good quality hay, haylage or grass. If a horse has trouble chewing the long-stem fibres then it is advisable to supply a forage replacer such as ReadyFibre Mash, which is ideal for horses that chew and digest less efficiently.

For underweight horses it is also beneficial to include some concentrates in the diet that will help supply the horse with more nutrients. High oil conditioning feeds such as Show 'n' Glow and ReadyMash Extra will always supply the horse with the extra calories required to promote weight gain and condition.



Feeding for Workload

It is vital that you take a horse's workload into account when trying to get them in perfect condition. If a horse's energy loss is greater than energy intake then weight, and subsequently, body condition will be lost. On the other hand, if a horse is receiving more energy than they are burning off daily then this will result in weight gain.

Most horses will do well on a high fibre feed such as Forage 'n' Fibre which will supply the low energy levels necessary for horses in light to moderate work. A horse in hard or intense work on the other hand will need a combination of energy sources including fibre, oils, protein and cereals, as found in Hunter Competition Mix, to meet the demands of work.

If your horse lacks stamina consider using oils such as Sumo Original as a source of slow release energy. Current research has proved that oil can be an extremely beneficial source of slow release energy, providing twice the amount of energy as carbohydrates from the more traditional cereals.

However, no two horses are alike. A highly strung Thoroughbred's diet will vary dramatically to that of a laid back Middleweight.

Feeding the Good Doer

When deciding on a balanced ration for your horse or pony, forage should be the forefront of the diet as it is the most natural for the digestive system ensuring a healthy hind-gut. In the wild horses will graze up to 18 hours a day but as the green grass turns lush over the summer months many people will find that they have to limit their horse's grazing either to prevent obesity, laminitis, cushings syndrome or just for good pasture management.

Although it is important to control the amount of grazing, it is equally important not to starve your horse or pony, as it still needs a high roughage diet to maintain normal gut function.

There are a number of products on the market that can be fed safely to your overweight horse or pony. High fibre, low calorie feeds that are low in starch and sugars with no cereals like Forage 'n' Fibre are suitable. It is possible for horses in light/medium work to have diets based entirely on forage as long as a supplement such as Sumo Vitem is included which is a



complete equine feed supplement combining 12 vitamins, 7 trace elements and 4 major minerals.