



MID-HUDSON VETERINARY PRACTICE, P.C.

BCS

# Body Condition Score



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**Have you noticed a chill is in the evening air? Fuzzy winter coats are not far off. Now is the ideal time to evaluate your horse's body condition score before those coats and additional blankets mask any extremes.**

## What is body condition score? (BCS)

This score uses both visual and manual appraisal of fat covering the six major points of the horse that are most likely to change with weight. A horse's condition is ranked on a scale of 1 to 9.

## What is ideal?

Horses should be maintained at condition scores of 5-7 for optimum health and performance. Optimum BCS for working horses is 5-6, and 6-7 for broodmares. Broodmares that have foaled need some fat stores due to the high nutritional requirements of lactation and recovery from foaling.

## What is less than ideal?

Horse maintained at BCS of 4 or below may suffer from decreased immunity, impaired reproductive efficiency, and lower work tolerance. Those horses maintained at BCS of 8-9 predisposes them to colic, laminitis and metabolic disorders.

## How do I score my horse?

**Visually observe the horse's side profile from a distance of 15-20 feet. This will usually give one a good idea of the general condition of the horse; too thin, too fat or about right.**

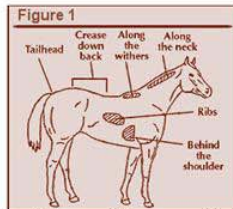
\*Horses with noticeable ribs will score 4 or lower.

\*If the ribs are not noticeable,

the horse will score 5 or greater.

\*Horses with long or thick hair coats will need closer examination by feeling the rib area. Be sure to distinguish between fat and muscle bulk / tone.

**Next, move close to the horse. Observe and feel for fat at the back, ribs, neck,**



**shoulders, withers, and tail head. See figure 1 for areas to evaluate for fat coverage. Finally, refer to the BCS table and photos at right. Select the image which most closely matches your horse's condition.**

## How do you alter your horse's BCS?

BCS can be affected by a variety of factors such as food availability, reproductive activities, work level, parasites, dental care and feeding practices.

## What if my horse has a BCS score of less than 4 or greater than 7?

The most sensible approach is to rule out any underlying medical problems that could be causing extremes in BCS. Fecal exams, oral exams and in some cases blood work may be indi-

cated.

Review your horse's food consumption (energy intake) relative to work or reproductive status (energy output). Most changes should be made gradually, unless under a veterinarian's recommendations.

Check the competition for food in your horse's environment. Is he low in the pecking order or a food hog?

Have your hay analyzed for nutritional content.

Assess if your horse's workload has changed without any accompanying change in feed level.

## Call our office to set up a nutritional consultation.

The promotional material from feed companies is overwhelming and confusing. A customized, gradual dietary modification is in the best interest of your horse.

## In the meantime:

If your horse is thin have winter blankets ready and waiting. Without a fat layer to warm your horse, protection from the elements is vital.

If your horse is overweight increase his/her exercise level until gradual dietary modification has an effect.

## Body Condition Score BCS Table

### 1 EXTREMELY THIN

The backbone, ribs, hips and tail head are all prominent. No fat can be felt.



### 2 VERY THIN

Bone structures of the neck, withers, and shoulder are evident.



### 3 THIN

The hips cannot be seen, but the withers, shoulder and neck are emphasized. The backbone is prominent.



### 4 MODERATELY THIN

Withers, shoulder and neck are not obviously thin.



### 5 MODERATE

Withers are rounded, shoulder and neck blend smoothly into the body. Back is level.



### 6 MODERATE TO FLESHY

Small deposits of fat along the withers, behind the shoulder and along the neck.



### 7 FLESHY

Noticeable fat along neck, behind shoulders and withers.



### 8 OBESE

Wither area is filled with fat, space behind shoulders is filled in and flush.



### 9 EXTREMELY OBESE

Bulging fat over tail head, withers, neck and shoulders. There is a prominent crease down the back.



## WANTED

Your photos. MHVP would like to put together a 2009 calendar featuring our client's horses! To do this we need your help and your pictures. You can send them by email or regular mail. Please include your name and the name of the horse(s) in your picture. You will also need to fill out and return the enclosed "permission to publish" form for your picture to be included in the calendar. Send your photos no later than 11/01/2008. These free calendars should be available sometime in December.

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