



## EQUINE NUTRITION SOURCE

### HOW TO BODY CONDITION SCORE YOUR HORSE

- The objective of body condition scoring is to differentiate between a thin, ideal, and fleshy horse.
- Scoring is done on a 1-9 scale.
  - 1 = emaciated
  - 5-6.5 = ideal
  - 9 = obeseSome systems score on the whole number, but I like to score to the .5 to ensure greater accuracy.
- This is a subjective measure of subcutaneous adipose tissue (fat) in multiple, palpable areas on the horse.
- The score is cumulative from the following areas. (See the image below for exact locations)



1. Along the neck: Does your horse have a cresty neck? Does the top of the neck wiggle easily, indicating excess fat, or is it pretty firm?

2. Behind the shoulder: Palpate this area to see if there is excess fat? Is it squishy? Is the shoulder well defined or does it start to blend in with the abdomen?

3. Ribcage: Before you palpate, can you see an outline of the ribs with your eye? If so, your horse will automatically score below a 5 (See the \*important rule\* below). Palpate 1/3 of the way down from the top of your horse's back. Is there a thick covering of flesh over the ribs, requiring you to push deeply to find them? Or is there a thin layer just barely covering the ribs?

4. Along the back: Rest your hand flat over top of your horse's back. Does your hand stay flat (just right), invert (too much flesh on either side of the spine, creating a channel for your hand to invert) or tent (the spine is too prominent without enough flesh on either side)?

5. Around the tailhead: Palpate directly to the right and left at the top of the tailhead. Do you feel extra squish here?

- Once you have palpated and scored these five areas between 1-9, add up your totals and divide by 5. This number is the body condition score of your horse.
- **\*IMPORTANT RULE\*** Ribs have more 'weight' than other areas. If the ribs are visible prior to palpating the horse, the horse is automatically below a 5, even if other areas are fleshy.
- Do not be fooled by visual illusions or conformational bias. Horses can have high or low withers, thick or narrow necks, long or short backs, long or short heart girths and wide or narrow rumps. Do not account for these observations. Only assess the 5 main areas where fat is stored to get the most accurate result.