



## FEEDING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OBESE HORSES in WA

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Avoiding obesity in horses and ponies through dietary management is always paramount, however in cases where obesity occurs, practices to decrease body condition are required. Obesity is a key risk factor for laminitis.

### Identifying Obesity

- Obese horses and ponies are classified as having body condition scores of 4 to 5 on the 0-5 BCS scale.
- Areas of adipose vary among individuals. Some will have an absence of palpable ribs, large fatty deposits behind the shoulder and tail head and a large firm crest. However, others may have palpable or even visible ribs leading some to describe them as 'lean', although retaining a large cresty neck or perhaps other hidden fat deposits.
- Size of neck crests can be another way to define level of Obesity and therefore the horse's apparent risk of Insulin Resistance and Laminitis.

0	No visual appearance of a crest. No palpable crest
1	No visual appearance of a crest, but slight filling felt with palpation
2	Noticeable appearance of a crest, but fat deposited fairly evenly from poll to withers. Crest easily cupped in one hand and bent from side to side
3	Crest enlarged and thickened, so fat is deposited more heavily in middle of the neck than toward poll and withers, giving a mounded appearance. Crest fills cupped hand and begins losing side to side flexibility
4	Crest grossly enlarged and thickened, and can no longer be cupped in one hand or easily bent from side to side. Crest may have wrinkles/creases perpendicular to topline
5	Crest is so large it permanently droops to one side

## Management

- Control pasture intake by either using a grazing muzzle or confining the horse to a yard, stable, small paddock or small area of the paddock.
- Exercise horse at a trot or faster pace (once progress of laminitis allows – do not exercise the horse whilst lameness is present).
- Offer low calorie hay – grass hay or straw are ideal and it is best to look for a late cut, mature stalky hay. Rain damaged grass hay may be suitable provided it is not mouldy. Avoid lucerne, clover or oaten hay.
- Ideally test the hay for energy content, nutrient composition and carbohydrate content.
- Soaking hay for 30 min in hot water or 60 min in cold water can reduce sugar and energy content
- Offer 1 - 1.5% of the horse's body weight per day in small feeds e.g. total of 4 – 6 kgs per day for a 400 kg horse divided into 3 – 4 meals per day or fed using a slow release haynet or hay feeder.
- Lower intakes will result in faster weight loss, however minimum intakes must be maintained to avoid gastrointestinal problems. Intakes can increase when acceptable weight is achieved.
- A low intake vitamin and mineral pellet or powder should be the only supplementary feed. **KER Gold Pellet** is an ideal supplement and is fed at 120g/500 kg B Wt. **KER Nutrequin** is also suitable.
- Thyroid hormone (Thyrol –L) supplementation may help speed up weight loss.

For detailed diet advice for an individual horse contact Kentucky Equine Research or Milne Feeds.

*Michelle Meylan*

Equine Sales & Marketing Manager  
Equine Nutrition Advisor



T : (08) 9351 0700

M : 0429 107 790

email: [meylanm@milne.com.au](mailto:meylanm@milne.com.au)

### **Kentucky Equine Research (Australasia) Pty Ltd**

Ph. (03) 8562 7000  
Fax (03) 8562 7007  
Cell: +61 400 106 334

Nutrition Consultation Service: 1800 772 198

Websites: [www.ker.com](http://www.ker.com)

[www.equinews.com/pegasus](http://www.equinews.com/pegasus)

[www.microsteed.com/pegasus](http://www.microsteed.com/pegasus)

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