

## What to do next...

If you find your horse is creeping above or below a condition score of 3, then it's time to review your feeding habits.

Any rapid changes in weight indicate that a serious problem is afoot, and a vet should be consulted straight away. Again, if the horse's score falls to 2 or below then all work should be stopped and advice from a vet sought as soon as possible. If the score is 4 or above, then the horse is at risk of weight-related illnesses like laminitis (which can affect horses as well as ponies). You can read more about laminitis and its potentially devastating effects on our website.

We all love to spoil our four-legged friends, but often the best solution is to simplify your horse's diet. It may also mean you'll have an extra tenner in your wallet to spend! Horses like to eat little and often, and are designed to cope with a low-energy diet of grass and hay or haylage.

Those that are in work, or may be less effective at keeping weight on like elderly horses or particular breeds, might need concentrated feed to keep them at their ideal weight. Give your feed manufacturer a call, who is likely to employ a nutritionist. He or she will be more than happy to help you to tailor a diet to your horse's needs, based on its breed, age, workload etc.

If you find all your attempts to keep a 'good doer' at the right weight are futile, then it may be worth asking your vet about a condition known as 'Equine Metabolic Syndrome'. Horses with EMS will become fat easily and may have fatty deposits around the body while the rest of it seems to be normal. Some horses may be genetically prone to this syndrome, but it can also be brought on by lack of exercise and an inappropriate diet. This condition is not totally understood yet, but it is worth asking your vet about EMS if other attempts to keep your horse's weight down have failed.

Of course, the horse's digestive system is a very sensitive work of art! So, any changes to diet must be made gradually and in consultation with a vet.

**We have weigh tapes to give away to the first 40 people to send back the slip at the bottom of this page! If you need advice on anything you have read here, or would like a copy of the National Equine Welfare Council's Compendium call our Welfare Team on 01508 481008, or email [welfare@redwings.co.uk](mailto:welfare@redwings.co.uk). For a pocket sized version of the body condition score chart featured in this edition please call or email us – or write a note at the top of this slip! You can read more about horsey dietary requirements on our website by clicking the Welfare Leaflets tab.**

**Keep in Touch....!** If you would like to receive each new edition of Welfare Matters directly, please just send your details to: The Welfare Team, Redwings, Hapton, Norwich NR15 1SP.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

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Or you can ring us on 01508 481008 or email [externalwelfare@redwings.co.uk](mailto:externalwelfare@redwings.co.uk)  
We would like to send you other regular Redwings mailings. If you do NOT want to receive them, please tick here.



# Welfare Matters

EDITION 9

## Body Condition Scoring Special

### Kensington - one end of the scale

### Know the Score:

- **Body condition scoring chart**
- **How to score your horse**
- **What to do next...**

### Keep in touch!



## Kensington's Road to Recovery



**Kensington on arrival at Redwings**

Redwings has seen many emaciated horses over the last 25 years, but only a handful as shockingly so as Kensington. Kensington and seven others were rescued by Redwings, in partnership with the RSPCA, from a site close to London. The group was severely underweight and suffering from an array of conditions and infestations including dermatitis, worms and lice. Kensington had a body condition score of zero and despite being 15.2hh he weighed the same as a small Native pony.

Astonishingly, his emaciation was simply down to serious mismanagement by his previous owner. However Kensington's recovery would still be one very long haul. Human nature makes it tempting to throw as much rich food as possible at such a clearly suffering horse, but his digestive system wouldn't have coped. Colic, choking and even laminitis could easily be triggered by such an extreme change in diet.

Following the golden rule of 'little and often', we began by feeding him small amounts of soaked hay and soaked hi-fibre nuts as they are easily digestible. Two months later Kensington was ready to be turned out onto a paddock with a small herd for a dose of Dr. Green! Living such a natural lifestyle has huge benefits for both psychological and physical wellbeing — and in the sixth months since he arrived at the Sanctuary Kensington has gained nearly 200 kilograms. But his rehabilitation didn't stop there!..

Once he had perked up, it became quite obvious that he'd probably received no handling from humans before he came to Redwings! He is currently in the middle of a very long and much-needed stint with our specialist handling team where he is improving all the time. He has recently made the huge step of having his feet trimmed with very few quibbles.

Fingers crossed, Kensington's experience will leave him with no long-term health problems and he will lead a very long and happy life here at Redwings... or possibly in a loving Guardian home.



**After sixth months of care**

# Horse

## Body Condition Score Chart



Published by Redwings' Welfare Team - with thanks to NEWC's Compendium

SCORE	VISUAL APPEARANCE	PELVIS	BACK & RIBS	NECK
<b>0. VERY POOR</b>		Angular, skin tight. Very sunken rump.	Deep cavity under tail. Skin tight over ribs. Very prominent and sharp backbone.	Marked ewe neck. Narrow and slack at base.
<b>1. POOR</b>		Prominent pelvis and croup. Sunken rump but skin supple. Deep cavity under tail.	Ribs easily visible. Prominent backbone with sunken skin on either side.	Ewe neck and slack at base.
<b>2. MODERATE</b>		Rump flat either side of backbone. Croup well defined, some fat. Slight cavity under tail.	Ribs just visible. Backbone covered but spines can be felt.	Narrow but firm.
<b>3. GOOD</b>		Covered by fat and rounded. No gutter. Pelvis easily felt.	Ribs just covered and easily felt. No gutter along back. Backbone well covered but spines can be felt.	No crest (except for stallions) firm neck.
<b>4. FAT</b>		Gutter to root of tail. Pelvis covered by fat. Need firm pressure to feel.	Ribs well covered - need pressure to feel.	Slight crest. Wide and firm.
<b>5. VERY FAT</b>		Deep gutter to root of tail. Skin distended. Pelvis buried, cannot be felt.	Ribs buried, cannot be felt. Deep gutter along back. Back broad and flat.	Marked crest very wide and firm. Fold of fat.

To obtain a body score, score the pelvis first, then adjust by half a point if it differs by one point or more to the back of the neck.

## Know the Score...

As the lush Spring grass begins to pop up – and horses are more likely to gain the odd kilogram or two - there is no better time than now to start regularly checking your horse's body condition score.

Although you may have heard this system being used in various welfare cases involving emaciated horses like Kensington, or seriously obese ponies like Nina pictured left, it can also be used by horse owners as part of routine management. If done regularly, at the same time as a weight assessment, condition-scoring your horse is a useful way of checking for subtle changes in the amount of body fat your horse is carrying.



Body condition scoring assesses how much body fat your horse has in relation to his muscular system, and is scored on a scale of 0 to 5 - with 0 being emaciation and 5 being obese. A condition score of 3 is the optimum, and is what horse owners should be aiming for, although anywhere between 2.5 and 3.5 is acceptable - depending on factors such as breed and age - according to the National Equine Welfare Council's compendium.

To assess your horse, you will need: a scoring chart (see left), your hands (!), a weigh tape, a notebook and camera. Carry out the assessment every few weeks at the same time of day, so you will be able to spot any trends and be able to make dietary adjustments accordingly. First of all, start by getting a good estimate of your horse's weight by using a weigh tape. Then mentally divide the horse's body up into three areas – the neck, the middle (back and ribs), and the pelvis– and condition score each area. You will need to use your hands to differentiate between wobbly fat and firm muscle!

Begin by assessing the pelvis. For a body condition score of 3, the pelvis should be nicely rounded and easily felt. The top of the horse's neck should be nice and firm, with no wobbly crest. The middle should be covered by a thin layer of fat and not be visible, but you should still be able to feel the ribs and spine with your hands. Take a score for each area, then find the average. However, if you find that the pelvis differs from the middle and neck by a whole point, then the whole body score will be the halfway mark between the pelvis, and middle and neck. For example, if the pelvis scores 2 – and the neck and middle score 3 – then the horse's total body condition score will be 2.5.

Take a picture of your horse and write down your findings in a notebook. Noticing changes in a horse that you see everyday can be very difficult, so taking a photograph will help you greatly for the next time you carry out an assessment.

Nina and a family of Shetlands had been left to gorge themselves on unlimited grazing. She had a body condition score of 5 when she was rescued and was suffering with laminitis as a result.

Shetlands are particularly good doers and their weight should be carefully managed.

