

The Body Condition Score

The body condition of horses based on the degree of fat cover is a good indicator of a horse's general health. The body condition score (BCS) allows one to assess if the horse is too thin, too fat, or about right. Horses are scored on a scale from 1 (poor) to 9 (extremely fat) in six areas where they deposit fat – neck, withers, spinous processes (part of back vertebrae that project upwards) and transverse processes (portion of vertebrae that projects outward), tail head, ribs, and behind the shoulder. The subjective assessment is based on visual and physical (palpation) of the specified body regions including the hooks (tuber coxae and hip joints) and pins (tuber ischia and lower pelvic bones). Comparisons of relative adiposity can be made within or between horses. Categorization of body condition as underweight (BCS \leq 3, 1–9-point scale), moderate (BCS 4–6), overweight (BCS \geq 7) or obese (BCS \geq 8) can be used as an aid in the management of body condition for optimal health and performance

Description of Individual Body Condition Scores

Score	Condition	Description	
1	Poor	Horse is extremely emaciated. Spinous processes, ribs, tail head, hooks, and pins project prominently. Bone structure of withers, shoulders, and neck easily noticeable. No fatty tissue can be felt.	
2	Very thin	Emaciated. Slight fat covering over base of the spinous processes, transverse processes of lumbar (loin area) vertebrae feel rounded. Spinous processes, ribs, tail head, hooks, and pins are prominent. Withers, shoulders, and neck structures are faintly discernible.	
3	Thin	Fat is built up about halfway on spinous processes, transverse processes cannot be felt. Slight fat cover over ribs. Spinous processes and ribs are easily discernible. Tail head is prominent, but individual vertebrae cannot be visually identified. Hook bones appear rounded but are easily discernible. Pin bones are not distinguishable. Withers, shoulders, and neck are accentuated.	
4	Moderately thin	Negative crease along back (spinous processes of vertebrae protrude slightly above surrounding tissue). Faint outline of ribs is discernible. Fat can be felt around the tail head; however, the tail head may or may not be visible depending on the breed. Hook bones are not discernible. Withers, shoulders and neck are not obviously thin.	

Score	Condition	Description	
5	Moderate	Back is level. Ribs cannot be visually distinguished but can be easily felt. Fat around tail head begins to feel spongy. Withers appear rounded over spinous processes. Shoulders and neck blend smoothly into body.	
6	Moderately fleshy	May have slight crease down back. Fat over ribs feels spongy. Fat around tail head feels soft. Fat begins to be deposited along the sides of the withers, behind shoulders and along neck.	
7	Fleshy	May have crease down back. Individual ribs can be felt, but with noticeable filling of fat between ribs. Fat around tail head is soft. Fat is deposited along withers, behind shoulders and along neck.	
8	Fat	Crease down back. Difficult to feel ribs. Fat around tail head is very soft. Area along withers is filled with fat. Area behind shoulder is filled with fat and flush with rest of the body. Noticeable thickening of neck. Fat is deposited along inner thighs.	
9	Extremely fat	Obvious crease down back. Patchy fat appears over ribs. Bulging fat around tail head, along withers, behind shoulders and along neck. Fat along inner thighs may rub together. Flank is filled with fat and flush with rest of the body.	

The recommendation is for horses to be maintained between a 4 to 6 BCS. Breeding mares should range between 6 to 7 and stallions have the best success with scores between 5 to 6. Performance horses typically have a BCS of 4 to 5.