



# WENSUM VALLEY VETS NEWSLETTER

## Equine Obesity Part 2: The impact of weight and condition on health

### Weight Isn't Just About Looks

It's tempting to think of weight as a purely cosmetic concern, but in horses, excess fat is an active health risk. Fat tissue doesn't just sit quietly under the skin - it's metabolically active, producing hormones and inflammatory substances that can disrupt your horse's entire system.

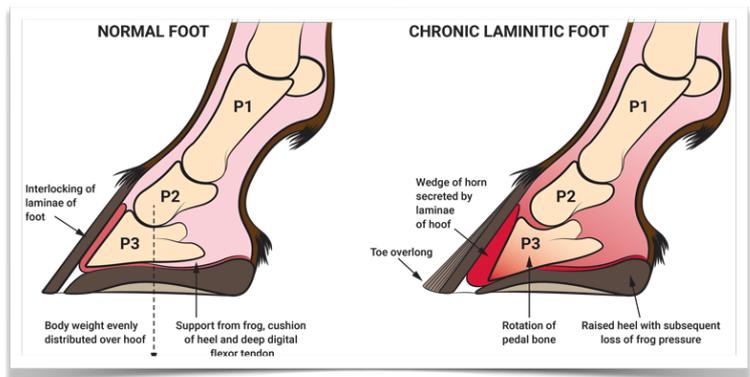
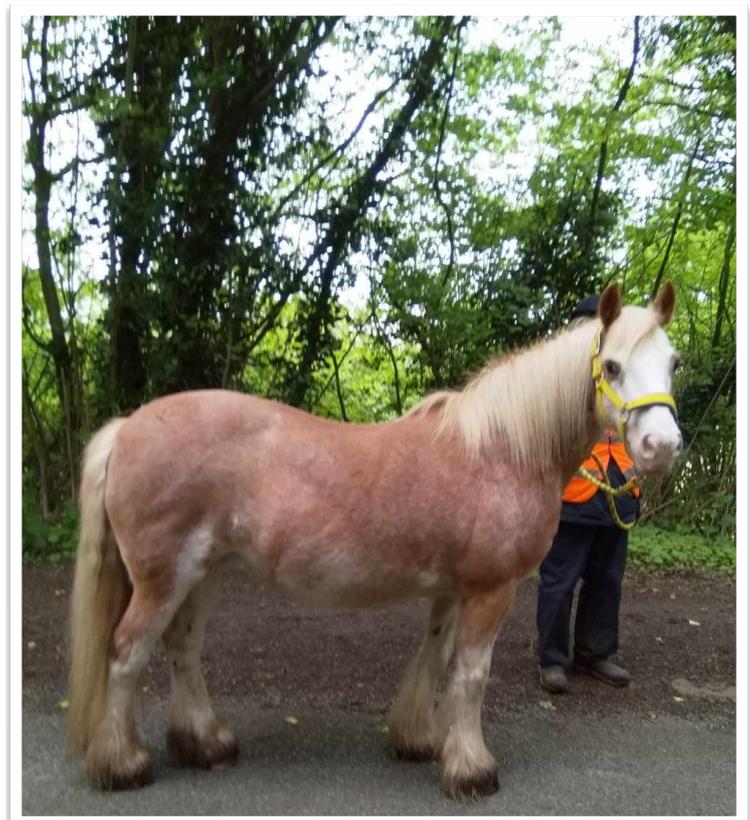
### The Hidden Dangers of Equine Obesity

#### 1. Laminitis

- This painful, potentially life-threatening inflammation of the laminae (the tissues securing the hoof wall to the bone) is strongly linked to excess weight and insulin dysregulation.
- Obese horses and ponies are at much greater risk of developing laminitis - sometimes without any other warning signs.

#### 2. Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS)

- EMS is a cluster of problems including insulin resistance, abnormal fat distribution (cresty neck, fat pads), and increased laminitis risk.
- Often develops silently, meaning horses may appear "fine" until a laminitic episode reveals the problem.



### 3. *Joint Stress and Arthritis*

- Every extra kilogram increases the strain on joints, tendons, and ligaments.
- This can accelerate wear-and-tear arthritis or worsen existing lameness.

### 4. *Reduced Performance and Stamina*

- Extra fat acts like carrying an unnecessary saddlebag every step of the way.
- Overheating and poor endurance are common in overweight horses.



### 5. *Reproductive Issues*

- Overweight mares may have reduced fertility and more foaling complications.

## “Hidden” Obesity

Not all overweight horses look obviously fat. Some store fat deep inside the abdomen and around organs - invisible from the outside but still metabolically dangerous. Regular body condition scoring (BCS) and weight monitoring on weighing scales are the only way to spot these risks early.

## The Obesity–Laminitis Cycle

- Overweight → Insulin resistance → Laminitis risk rises
- Pain from laminitis → Reduced mobility → Weight gain worsens
- Without intervention, this cycle can become a permanent problem

Insulin resistance is similar to Type 2 diabetes in people, with blood insulin levels increasing in an out of control manner and not responding normally to food/sugar inputs. Insulin in the blood can then bind to growth receptors in the hoof causing excessive growth and inflammation, ultimately leading to laminitis.

## Owner Action Plan for This Month

- ✦ Review your horse’s BCS and weigh tape measurements from last month
- ✦ Watch for subtle signs - crest thickening, fat pads appearing
- ✦ Book a metabolic health test (blood tests for insulin/glucose) for overweight horses or ponies
- ✦ Remember: prevention is far easier (and cheaper) than treating laminitis or metabolic disease



*If you’re concerned about your horse’s weight or laminitis risk, we can assess their metabolic health, design a monitoring plan, and offer targeted advice. Call us on **01328 864444** to book a weight review or discuss blood testing for EMS.*



