



# WENSUM VALLEY VETS NEWSLETTER

## Equine Obesity Part 1: Identifying the problem and knowing if your horse is overweight

As the summer months roll on and pastures stay rich, many horses and ponies quietly gain weight without their owners noticing. This creeping weight gain is a real challenge - especially when we see our horses every day and subtle but constant changes can easily go unnoticed. A little extra weight may seem harmless, but catching it early can prevent far more serious health conditions in the future.

### Recognising the early signs

Horses rarely store fat evenly. Signs of excess weight gain include:

- “Cresty” neck - the crest feels firm or lumpy, not soft and flexible.
- Fat pads - behind the shoulder, over the ribs, at the tail head.
- Back profile - a dip (“gutter”) along the spine from excess fat.
- Sheath/udder swelling - fat can accumulate in this area causing it to appear swollen or enlarged

Difficulty feeling ribs - you should be able to feel them with light pressure as your run your hand along your horse to stroke it

*Top Tip: Compare current photos with ones from 6-12 months ago - visual changes often stand out more in pictures than in daily life.*

### Body Condition Scoring (BCS)

BCS is a structured way to score your horse’s fat cover. It is most easily assessed in person and by touching the relevant areas of your horse.

We recommend using the 1-5 scale (1 = very poor, 3 = ideal, 5 = obese):

Score	Description
1-1.5	Poor - very visible ribs, hips, and spine
2-2.5	Moderately thin — ribs easily felt, little fat cover
<b>3</b>	<b>Ideal</b> - ribs felt with light pressure, smooth outline
3.5-4	Overweight — fat pads forming, crest thickening
4.5-5	Obese — ribs cannot be felt, obvious fat deposits



## Cresty Neck Scoring (CNS)

Separate to BCS, CNS is a 0-5 score of fat on the neck crest:

- **0** = No crest
- **3** = Noticeable crest that falls to one side
- **5** = Very large crest with hard fat deposits

A high CNS ( $\geq 3$ ) is linked to insulin dysregulation and higher laminitis risk, even if BCS is otherwise moderate.

## Using a Weigh Tape Correctly

While not perfect, a weigh tape is a consistent way to monitor trends:

1. Place the tape around the girth area, just behind the withers
2. Pull the tape snug but not too tight
3. Always measure in the same spot and ideally at the same time of day
4. Record the number and date

Why it matters:

- Tracks change over weeks/months
- Helps with accurate wormer dosing
- Acts as a warning sign of weight gain before visible fat appears

## Owner Action Plan for This Month

- Take baseline photos (side-on, front, and rear views)
- Score your horse's BCS and CNS
- Use a weigh tape and record the number
- Schedule a veterinary health examination and BCS scoring session within the next month
- Feel free to schedule a visit to the clinic to use our equine weighing scales (there is no charge for this)

If you're unsure about your horse's condition, our vets can help you with a BCS assessment and show you exactly how to body condition score your horse. Early detection of weight gain is the first step to keeping your horse healthy.

*Call us on **01328 86444** to schedule a weigh in at the clinic or add a body condition assessment and discussion to your next visit*



