

# Be *Ready!*

## Preparing for a Nutritional Consultation

Teaming up with a knowledgeable equine nutritionist is the best way to ensure that your horse is receiving optimal nutrition. Before consulting with a nutritionist, it is wise to take an objective look at your horse and what you're feeding him. By being prepared for the consultation, both you and your horse will get the most out of it.

### DESCRIBE THE HORSE

**Accurate measurements.** Basic information such as your horse's age, sex, and breed are easy to pass along, but other information must be gathered in order for the nutritionist to have a clear vision of the horse or pony he's evaluating, particularly if the consultation is being done electronically.

Most important, the horse's height and weight should be collected. Weight is best determined through the use of an electronic scale because of the accuracy of these instruments, but a weigh-tape measurement is acceptable. Absolute precision is not necessary, but sometimes horses

and ponies are deceptively heavy. In addition to height and weight, body condition score should be noted. An abridged version of the body condition score descriptions is shown on page 7. Photographs of your horse from different angles will help the nutritionist if the consultation is performed electronically.

**Detail the routine.** A thorough description of the horse's life stage and workload is needed by a nutritionist to determine nutrient requirements. An idle horse asked to perform no exercise has markedly different requirements than a broodmare at peak milk production or a polo pony in full work. For performance horses, it is important to disclose the details of the horse's training schedule. The description might be something as simple as "he's ridden 45 minutes four days a week, primarily at the trot and canter" to a more complex training schedule, such as that encountered in eventing or endurance riding. The key to determining workload is accurate representation of the exercise asked of the horse.

By consulting with a qualified equine nutritionist, you can take the guesswork out of formulating an appropriate ration for your horse.

*Note unusual feeding challenges.* Does your horse or pony have a feeding or nutritional idiosyncrasy that most other horses don't have? Has your pony had laminitic episodes in the past? Does your gelding have a low tolerance for starch in his diet? Does your mare break out in hives when she's fed alfalfa? Pass on any essential information to the nutritionist so it can be figured into the final recommendations.

## INVENTORY THE FEEDSTUFFS

*Forage.* Because they are the most natural of feedstuffs, forages should be the basis of all equine diets, and therefore most horses and ponies rely on forages as the primary sources of calories. If fed primarily hay or an alternative forage product (hay cubes or hay pellets), it is easy to determine nutrient composition through laboratory testing. (See sidebar on how to get your forage tested.) If your horse consumes mostly pasture, it will be necessary to describe the pasture accurately in terms of acreage and number of horses grazing per acre as well as plant type, quality, and abundance. If the turnout area is a drylot or contains only unpalatable weeds, mention this. Many horses consume a combination of preserved and fresh forages, and the nutritionist will need to know how much of each (e.g., how much time spent grazing and how much time spent stalled consuming hay).

*Concentrates.* Many horses are given cereals grains, most commonly oats, or commercial textured or pelleted feeds. In order for a nutritionist to ascertain what nutrients the horse is receiving from the concentrate, he must know the composition of it and the amount being fed. The composition can usually be determined from information printed on the bag or tag, so have this information handy. The amount fed must be relayed in weight, not volume. Because scoops and dip-pers come in various sizes, it is best to weigh the amount fed daily. An everyday kitchen scale can be used for this.

*Salt.* Do you have a salt block available to your horse or pony at all times? Be sure to let the nutritionist know. Sodium and chloride are often deficient in typical grain and hay diets, but free-choice access to a salt block alleviates that concern.

*Supplements.* The benefits of certain nutritional supplements are indisputable. To complete your horse's nutritional evaluation, a complete list of supplements must be provided. Included in the list should be the name of the supplement, the daily amount recommended by the manufacturer, and the daily amount actually given to the horse. A brief explanation of why a particular supplement is fed is also helpful. For example, if you feed a natural vitamin E supplement, the explanation may be as brief as, "my gelding doesn't have access to pasture." Oversupplementation is a frequent problem among horses, so a complete accounting of all supplements is necessary to avoid this.

Assembling all of the information you can about your horse and his diet before the consultation will help ensure that you get the most out of your time with the nutritionist.

# Be Ready!

Preparing for a Nutritional Consultation

## FORAGE TESTING

The surest way to determine if hay is appropriate for horses is by conducting a thorough visual inspection and sending samples for laboratory testing. By doing this, you can be more confident in the forage choices you make for your horses. Go to [www.equi-analytical.com](http://www.equi-analytical.com) for more information on forage sampling and testing.

## BODY CONDITION SCORES AND DESCRIPTIONS

[1] Poor	Animal extremely emaciated; vertebrae, ribs, and hip bones projecting prominently; bone structure of withers, shoulders, and neck easily noticeable, no fatty tissue can be felt
[2] Very thin	Animal emaciated; slight fat covering over vertebrae; ribs, tailhead, and hip bones prominent; withers, shoulders, and neck structure faintly discernible
[3] Thin	Slight fat cover over ribs; ribs easily discernible; tailhead prominent, but individual vertebrae cannot be identified visually; hip bones appear rounded but easily discernible; withers, shoulders, and neck accentuated
[4] Moderately thin	Slight ridge along back; faint outline of the ribs discernible; tailhead prominence depends on conformation, fat can be felt around it; hip bones not discernible; withers, shoulders, and neck not obviously thin
[5] Moderate	Back is flat (no crease or ridge); ribs not visually distinguishable but easily felt; fat around tailhead beginning to feel spongy; withers appear rounded over; shoulders and neck blend smoothly into body
[6] Moderately fleshy	May have slight crease down back; fat over ribs spongy; fat around tailhead soft; fat beginning to be deposited along the side of withers, behind shoulders, and along the sides of neck
[7] Fleshy	May have crease down back; individual ribs can be felt but noticeable filling between ribs with fat; fat around tailhead soft; fat deposited along withers, behind shoulders, and along neck
[8] Fat	Crease down back; difficult to feel ribs; fat around tailhead very soft; area along withers filled with fat; area behind shoulder filled with fat; noticeable thickening of the neck; fat deposited along the inner thighs
[9] Extremely fat	Obvious crease down back; patchy fat appearing over ribs; bulging fat around tailhead, along withers, behind shoulders, and along neck; fat along inner thighs may rub together; flank filled with fat

# Be *Ready!*

Preparing for a Nutritional Consultation



MARK LLEWELLYN

[A]



EILEEN PHETHEAN



KENTUCKY EQUINE HUMANE CENTER

[D]



EILEEN PHETHEAN

## CONDITION SCORING [PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT]

Body condition scoring (BCS) requires excellent observation and palpation skills. Though you are unable to touch the horses in these photographs, here's your chance to pit your knowledge of BCS against the experts at Kentucky Equine Research. A brief description of each horse is given here, and the expert opinions are given on page 10.

- [A]** Three-year-old Quarter Horse gelding, 16 hands
- [B]** Thirty-year old Welsh-cross gelding, 12.2 hands
- [C]** Sixteen-year-old Warmblood-cross gelding, 16.2 hands
- [D]** Two-year-old crossbred filly, 15 hands
- [E]** Five-year-old Percheron-cross gelding, 16 hands
- [F]** Seven-year-old Thoroughbred gelding, 16.2 hands



**[B]**

MARK LLEWELLYN



**[C]**



**[E]**

MARK LLEWELLYN



**[F]**

# Be *Ready!*

Preparing for a Nutritional Consultation

**[A]** This gelding is in moderate body condition, appropriate for his age and level of work, which was described as light. This is a smooth individual with even fat distribution that covers the ribs and rounds the croup. There is no evidence of excessive fat on the tailhead. His withers are flanked by fat but not overly so; and his neck ties in at the shoulder with acceptable definition. This gelding shows no evidence of an excessively fatty crest, and he is clean through the throatlatch. Coupled with his appropriate body condition, the gelding's well-conditioned coat is testament to a suitable diet. BCS: 5

**[B]** The most striking evidence of extreme obesity is the amount of fat that thickens the entire length of the barrel and croup and the lumpy deposits bulging all over this gelding's body. The tailhead completely disappears between fatty deposits, and his sheath is enlarged from fat accumulation. The topline can be likened to a tabletop, extremely wide and flat, and there's likely a depression along the backbone. The crest of the neck is thick and heavy. He's lived a long and useful life as a children's mount, so whatever retirement granted him was just. Even in retirement, though, a close eye should be kept on body condition. BCS: 9

**[C]** This gray gelding is in beautiful condition for a middle-aged horse in light work. Keeping him this trim requires diligence, according to his owner, as he is an easy keeper that packs on condition quickly. He requires nothing more than limited grazing on high-quality pasture, mid-quality hay, and a balancer pellet. This horse carries a bit more condition than A, especially noticeable in the deeper barrel and flank as well as the tailhead. He has the beginning of a cresty neck and has lost some of the definition where the neck joins to the shoulder. He also has evidence of fat pads behind the shoulder. BCS: 6

**[D]** This filly exhibits the effects of inadequate energy intake, muscle wasting, and parasitism. Her neck

is pencil-thin and set roughly into a bony shoulder, her spinal column protrudes, and her hipbones are prominent. Though this photograph was taken in late spring when healthy horses in the same geographical area were shedding their winter coats, this filly was holding steadfastly to hers, another indication of extremely poor health. Notice too the sunken areas near the withers and tailhead. A thoughtful refeeding program under the guidance of a nutritionist and in conjunction with a veterinarian is needed in instances like this. BCS: 1

**[E]** This gelding's breeding suggests ruggedness and power, but obesity is no more acceptable in drafts than their lightweight relatives. This gelding has even fat covering that appears to cover the horse from the throatlatch to the tailhead. The withers are rounded and presumably the back is wide and flat. The thick throatlatch, somewhat cresty neck, and lack of definition at the shoulder-neck tie-in all indicate overconditioning. The amount of fat behind the shoulder is abundant. Some of the roundness in this horse may be due to his draft heritage, as might the smooth overall manner in which he carries adipose tissue. BCS: 8

**[F]** This gelding's withers are mountainous, and they will probably always be, regardless of how much weight he gains. His ribs are easily identifiable. His neck ties in beautifully to his shoulder, the spinal column is not detectable in any way, and the hipbones are covered with a layer of fat. This gelding's body condition improved over time, but progress was hindered frequently by the horse's picky appetite. After much trial and error, a diet was concocted that suited this nervous gelding. Among other things, his diet included mixed hay with generous portions of alfalfa and a high-fat, high-fiber feed. This gelding's athleticism negates any frustration caused by his inappetence or saddle-fitting, which is complicated by those withers. BCS: 4 