



Remember we are here at Bransby Horses to support you with the health and welfare of your horse, if you require further information on any of the above or you would like to discuss your management plan please call 01427 787369 or email welfare@bransbyhorses.co.uk.



Find us at LN1 2PH 01427 788 464 **BransbyHorses.co.uk** 

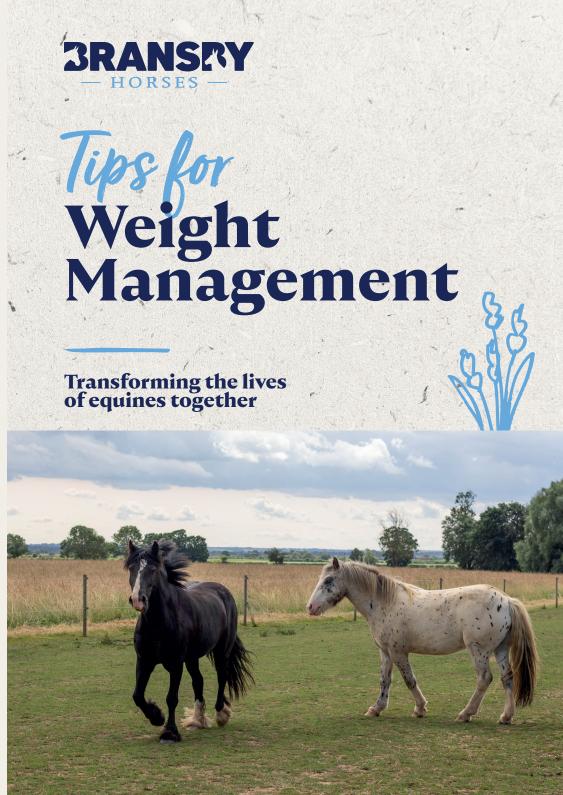












Being overweight is a common welfare issue that we are all dealing with, managing your equine's weight can be quite complex, especially if they have other needs. Overweight equines can have a number of other health issues, for example, Laminitis, Equine Metabolic Syndrome and joint problems like Arthritis. In the past horses were used for work and they used the nutrients from their food for the energy required to do the job. Their digestive system has evolved for the horse to eat fibre, trickle feed, and naturally graze for around 18 hours a day. Due to domestication this can sometimes pose a problem when we are constantly trying to manage their weight and keep them at the ideal Body Condition Score of 3.

If your equine in not in full work or is kept as a companion they can use the food that they eat to gain weight because they do not need it for energy.

Here are a few handy hints for managing weight gain but still considering the equine's welfare needs.

## **Assessing bodyweight**

As part of responsible ownership, it is important for owners to monitor their horse or pony's bodyweight on a regular basis to adjust feeding and/or exercise regimes accordingly.

There are several ways in which weight can be monitored on equines, the most accurate being a weigh bridge. Calibrated weigh bridges come in a variety of models. The most



common model is a portable type that fits into cars. Many feed companies or country stores now have these, offering regular weighing services so owners are able to accurately monitor their horse's weight.

A weigh-tape is a cheap tool that is effective for monitoring weight fluctuations, as opposed to accurate weight of the horse itself. A weigh-tape measures the circumference of the girth area, but this does not consider fat distribution across other areas of the body; moreover, different brands will give very varied readings.

Body condition scoring is a subjective method of assessment which varies depending on the skills and training the individual has – however, this is an easy method for the horse-owner to carry out regularly at home to monitor any changes. At Bransby Horses we recommend using the 0-5 Body Condition Score (BCS) scale and assess the horse in three key areas: neck, abdomen and hindquarters before an average score is determined.

## For more information on body condition scoring scan the QR code



## Managing Weight in Ridden and Companion Equines

Feed 1.5% of body weight instead of 2.5% - You can lower the percentage of food intake to diet the equine but not starve them, this will cause other problems. Weight loss should be done slowly over a period of time, depending on how much they need to lose. We advise speaking to your vet before making any changes to your equine's diet.

**Measure feeds -** Try not to guess how much they should be eating; this applies to forage too! Weigh your hay nets, you can ask for support from Bransby Horses to help you calculate what your equine should be having.

**Offer food little and often** - Although this is already a golden rule of feeding, it is important that we use this, so they are foraging regularly throughout the day, rather than having all their daily food in one go. Three or four small nets spread out throughout the day is much better for them.

**Small holed hay nets** - Because you are feeding smaller quantities, provide your low sugar content meadow hay in small, holed nets. This will mean that the hay lasts longer, keeping your equine entertained for longer, trying to replicate the trickle feeding behaviour.

**Soak hay** - Try to reduce calorific value of the food given, this can be by soaking the hay, this reduces the sugar content but still provides the fibre required.

**Only feed concentrates if necessary** - Do take advice, does your equine need a bucket feed? If they require a balancer or medication, can you provide this in a fibre ball that can be hand fed?

**Restrict grazing** - If you have the facilities to do this you can try track systems, creating a track that measures at least one and a half lengths of the biggest horse on your track



around the perimeter of your field. This enhances movement, place their forage, water, and shelter in different places around the track to promote movement. If you require more detail or advice on this, please get in touch with Bransby Horses.

**Weigh and monitor regularly** - When you are on the path of weight loss, it is important to weigh and record your findings regularly, every month. You can monitor the weight loss and adjust the diet and management as required.

**Consider the seasons** - Depending on the time of year the grass will differ in quality and quantity. Be aware of the spring and summer months, the sugar content will be higher but also be aware in the autumn frosty days.

**Try not over rug** - A horse's and pony's coat will produce natural oils that act as a form of waterproofing. If we over rug we are stopping them using their body fat to provide warmth.

**Clipping** - Consider a small neck and belly clip to support weight management, if your equine is such a good doer that you need extra support with managing their weight, you could try a small clip to allow their internal temperature to do the job for you. As they need to create warmth from having the clip they will use body fat to do this, therefore support weight loss. If you notice that your horse is cold, consider using a rug.

**The natural seasons** - Use the winter months to naturally lower the weight in preparation for the spring grass and the natural influx of weight.