



# Body condition scoring and cresty neck scoring



CARE about laminitis project  
[www.careaboutlaminitis.org.uk](http://www.careaboutlaminitis.org.uk)



We would like to thank World Horse Welfare for funding the CARE about Laminitis project and for helping put together these guidelines. If you are interested in the work it does to help improve equine welfare worldwide, please visit the website at [www.worldhorsewelfare.org](http://www.worldhorsewelfare.org)



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Registered charity no: 206658 and SC038384

CARE about Laminitis is a collaborative project between the Animal Health Trust (AHT) and the Royal Veterinary College (RVC), with ongoing support from Rossdales Equine Hospital.

If you would like more information on the work the AHT undertakes to fight disease and injury in animals, please visit the website at [www.aht.org.uk](http://www.aht.org.uk)



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Lanwades Park  
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Registered Charity No: 209642

If you are interested in the work that the RVC does or the study options offered, please visit the website at [www.rvc.ac.uk](http://www.rvc.ac.uk)



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If you would like to see the services that Rossdales Equine Hospital offers, please visit the website at [www.rossdales.com](http://www.rossdales.com)



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*All these instructions are also available online at [www.careaboutlaminitis.org.uk](http://www.careaboutlaminitis.org.uk)*

*Please don't forget to input all final values online on the Weight Tracker page of the website.*



## General Instructions

There are some important rules that should be followed when taking measurements and scoring your horse/pony.

Decide on a set time (both time of day and in relation to exercise & feeding) – ideally when your horse/pony is relaxed and comfortable – and make each subsequent recording at approximately the same time. Their weight can fluctuate significantly over a 24 hour period and ensuring you take the measurements/score at a similar time will mean you are comparing like for like.

### You should always take these steps when preparing to measure/score:

**Step 1** – Find a level, firm surface for your horse/pony to stand on. Concrete is preferable, but level dirt or short grass would be fine if concrete is not at hand.

**Step 2** – Position your horse/pony so that they are standing square (with their front and hind feet together) and in a straight line. Also ensure they are bearing weight on all four feet.

Follow these basic rules:

- same person taking measurements/doing scoring
- same method of measuring/scoring used
- same place
- same time

Consistency in measurements/scoring will ensure the accuracy of weight monitoring.

## Body Condition Scoring and Cresty Neck Scoring

In this study, we will be using the Carroll and Huntingdon (1988) 5-point scale to estimate a Body Condition Score (BCS) and a 5-point scale developed by Carter *et al.* (2009) to estimate a Cresty Neck Score (CNS).

While your horse/pony's actual weight gives us an objective method of assessing the "condition" of the horse, weight alone does not discriminate between muscle and fat. As in humans, a heavily muscled athlete would be considered "overweight" or "obese" on a regular Body Mass Index (BMI) scale – in the same category as a person/horse that was truly overweight. That is why assessing a condition score, along with a weight estimation measurement, will provide us with a better idea of the actual shape your horse or pony is in. Body Condition Scoring is also sometimes referred to as fat scoring. We team up with World Horse Welfare and find out how to assess our horses/ponies using the 5-point BCS scale.

We are going to use an averaging system designed by Dr Teresa Hollands to estimate the BCS. You can't effectively estimate a BCS just by looking – you need to feel for the fat cover in certain areas.

**Steps 1 & 2** - follow the steps from **pg 3**. Also review the **general instructions** and rules.

**Step 3** - Picture an imaginary line dividing your horse/pony into three sections:

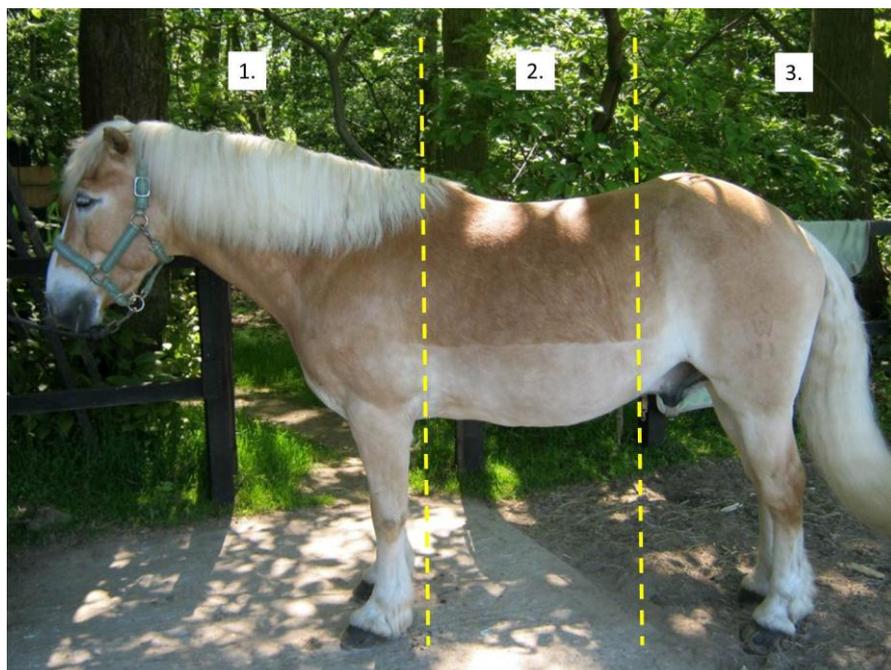
### Section 1: Neck and shoulder

*The cut-off point between sections 1 and 2 would be the withers*

### Section 2: Middle (Back and belly)

*The cut-off point between sections 2 and 3 would be the last rib*

### Section 3: Bottom (Pelvis to tail)



Referring to the images and descriptions in the Body Condition Score guide on page 6, you will need to give your horse/pony one score out of five for their **neck and shoulder (section 1)**, one for their **middle (section 2)** and one for their **bottom (section 3)**, then take an average (add all three scores together and divide by 3). Horses store their weight in different areas, so an average of these scores will produce a more accurate assessment. In the BCS guide, the text that refers to each section has been colour-coded appropriately.

### Section 1: Neck and shoulder

- Feel along the top of your horse/pony's neck – can you wobble the top of it (fat), or is it firm (muscle)? Also feel if it is significantly thicker as you move down from the poll towards the withers.
- Run your hand down your horse/pony's neck and onto its shoulder. If fat has built up in front of his shoulder blades, your hand will run from the neck to the shoulder without the shoulder blade 'stopping' your hand. Native breeds often store excess fat in 'pads' behind their shoulders, so feel for this. Look at the BCS guide on the next page and score them out of five for their neck and shoulder.



### Section 2: Middle (Back and belly)

- Lay your hand across their back. Ideally, your hand should arch over the spine. When horses/ponies put weight on in this area, the fat builds up on either side of the spine, giving you a flat hand.
- Run your hand along their side. You should be able to feel their ribs fairly easily. Horses don't store much fat on their underbellies, so don't use this area to assess their weight. Again, give them a score out of five for their back and middle by referring to the BCS guide on the next page.



### Section 3: Bottom (Pelvis to tail)

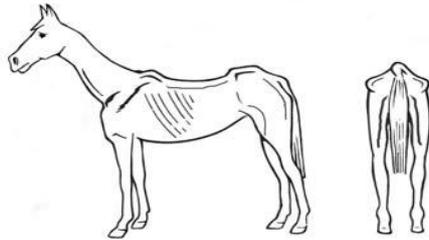
Look at your horse/pony from behind – safely. Their bottom should have a rounded curve. Feel for fat pads at the base of the tail. Give them a score out of five for their bottom.



Once you have all three scores for each section, take an average to get the overall BCS score. So for example – if you score 4 for **section 1**, 3 for **section 2** and 4 for **section 3**, then your final average score would be  $(4 + 3 + 4) / 3 = 3.6$ .

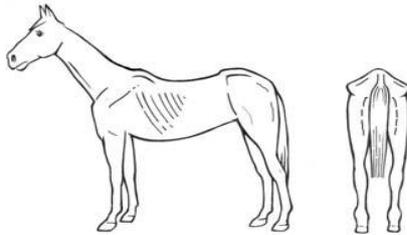
## Body Condition Score Guide

0



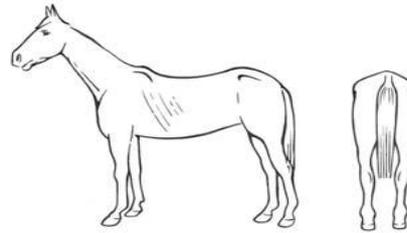
Marked 'ewe' neck, narrow and slack at base. Skin tight over the ribs, which are clearly visible. Spinous processes sharp and easily seen. Angular pelvis, skin tight, very sunken rump. Deep cavity under tail and either side of croup.

1



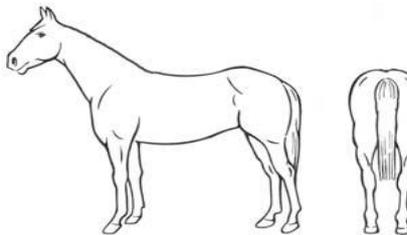
'Ewe' neck, narrow and slack at base. Ribs clearly visible. Skin clearly shrunken either side of spine. Spinous processes well defined. Rump sunken but skin supple, pelvis and croup well defined, cavity under tail.

2



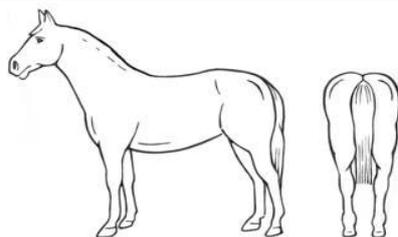
Neck narrow but firm, shoulder blade clearly defined. Ribs just visible. Spine well covered. Spinous processes felt but not seen. Rump flat either side of spine, croup well defined, some fat, slight cavity under tail.

3



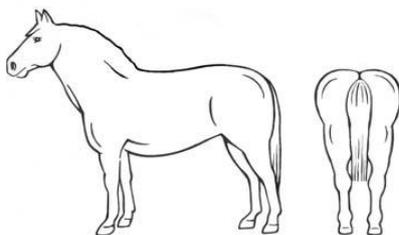
Firm neck, no crest (except stallions), shoulder blades defined. Ribs just covered, easily felt. No gutter along back. Spinous processes covered, but can be felt. Pelvis covered by fat and rounded, no gutter, pelvis easily felt.

4



Slight crest on neck, wide and firm. Ribs well covered. Gutter along spine to root of tail. Fat stored either side of the spine to form slight 'apple bottom', with a gutter down the middle. Pelvis covered, felt only with firm pressure.

5

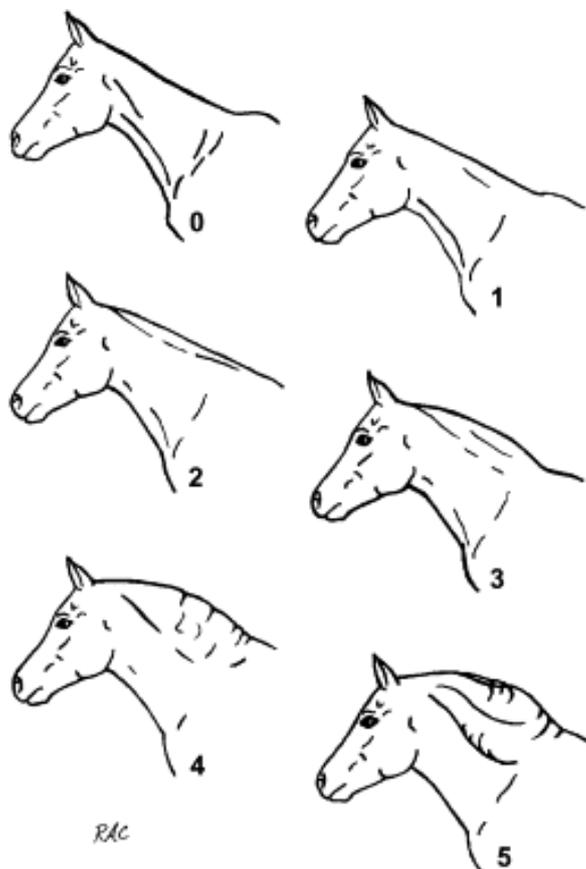


Marked crest, very wide and firm, creases of fat. Shoulder blade buried and difficult to feel. Ribs buried, cannot be felt. Deep gutter along spine, back broad and flat. Deep gutter to root of tail, producing marked 'apple bottom', skin distended. Pelvis buried, cannot be felt.

Images obtained with kind permission from the National Equine Welfare Council.

In a similar way in which we assessed the score for the neck and shoulder in **section 1** of the BCS, we will also give our horse/pony a Cresty Neck Score (CNS) based on the images and descriptions below:

Score	Description
0	No palpable crest.
1	No visual appearance of a crest, but slight filling felt with palpation.
2	Noticeable appearance of a crest, but fat deposited fairly evenly from poll to withers. Crest easily cupped in one hand and bent from side to side.
3	Crest enlarged and thickened, so fat is deposited more heavily in middle of the neck than towards poll and withers, giving a mounded appearance. Crest fills cupped hand and begins losing side to side flexibility.
4	Crest grossly enlarged and thickened, and can no longer be cupped in one hand or easily bent from side to side. Crest may have wrinkles or creases perpendicular to the topline.
5	Crest is so large it permanently droops to one side.



Source: Carter *et al.*, 2009

You will need both the BCS and the CNS to complete your monthly questionnaire follow-ups which can be found online at [www.careaboutlaminitis.org.uk](http://www.careaboutlaminitis.org.uk).

## References

Carroll, C. L. and Huntington, P. J. 1988. Body condition scoring and weight estimation of horses. *Equine Veterinary Journal*, **20**: 41-45.

Carter, R. A., Geor, R. J., Burton Staniar, W., Cubitt, T. A. and Harris, P. A. 2009. Apparent adiposity assessed by standardised scoring systems and morphometric measurements in horses and ponies. *The Veterinary Journal*, **179**: 204 – 210.