

BODY CONDITION SCORING



Evaluate your horse's diet by looking into 3 key areas:

Top line: muscle development from amino acids and genetics

Fat thickness: behind their shoulder, over their ribs and around the tailhead from calories

Distended belly: larger than normal from -

a) eating indigestible forage causing hay belly and/or

b) lack of physical fitness

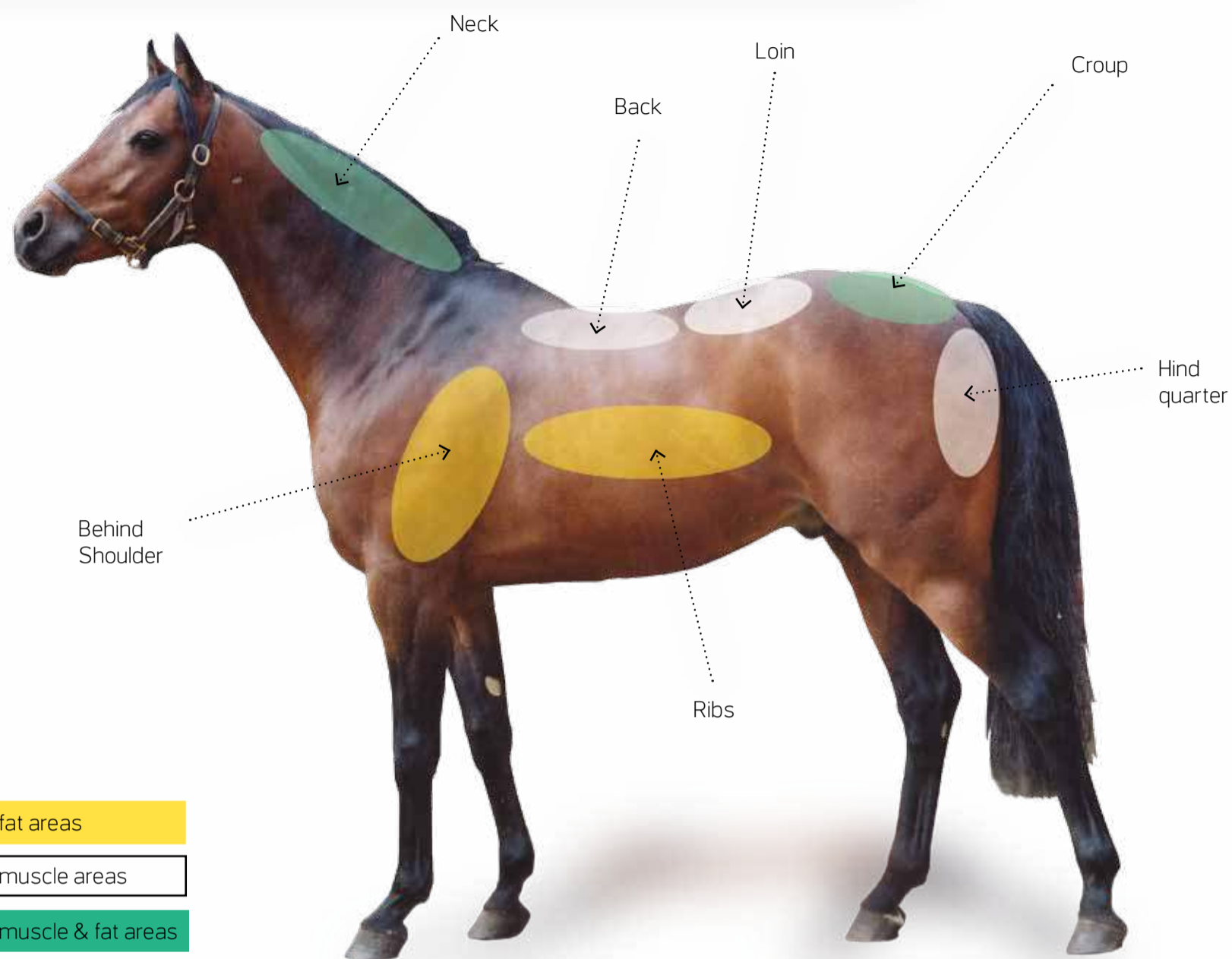
The first step to deciding what, other than forage, you are going to feed your horse or pony, is to establish his or her overall condition. This can be quite a subjective issue - your idea of "thin" or "fat" may be quite different from somebody else's! For this reason nutritionists have developed a system known as "condition scoring" to describe the various states of condition.

Having established your horse's current condition, the next step is to decide whether that is how you would like him to stay or whether you need to make changes in order to help change his condition. Here you will need to consider the work the horse is expected to undertake and the level of fitness he needs to attain. A dressage horse, for example, needs stamina and muscle tone for physical effort but carries more condition than a three day eventer who has to be fit and lean to gallop and jump. Familiarity with your particular horse or pony will also help you decide whether he or she is a good doer and needs relatively few extra calories to maintain or put on condition, or whether they are a poor doer who needs much more.

Body Condition & Top Line scoring is an objective way to assess your horse's condition. Some discrepancies may be present simply due to the horse's conformation or state of training or development, so he may appear to have moderate looking hind quarters with a thin looking neck. Whilst feeding can help to balance these differences by providing the "building blocks", it is correct training and work which will help build the right muscles and give the horse a more pleasing shape.



EVALUATE FAT THICKNESS & MUSCLE DEVELOPMENT (top line)



TOP LINE ASSESSMENT

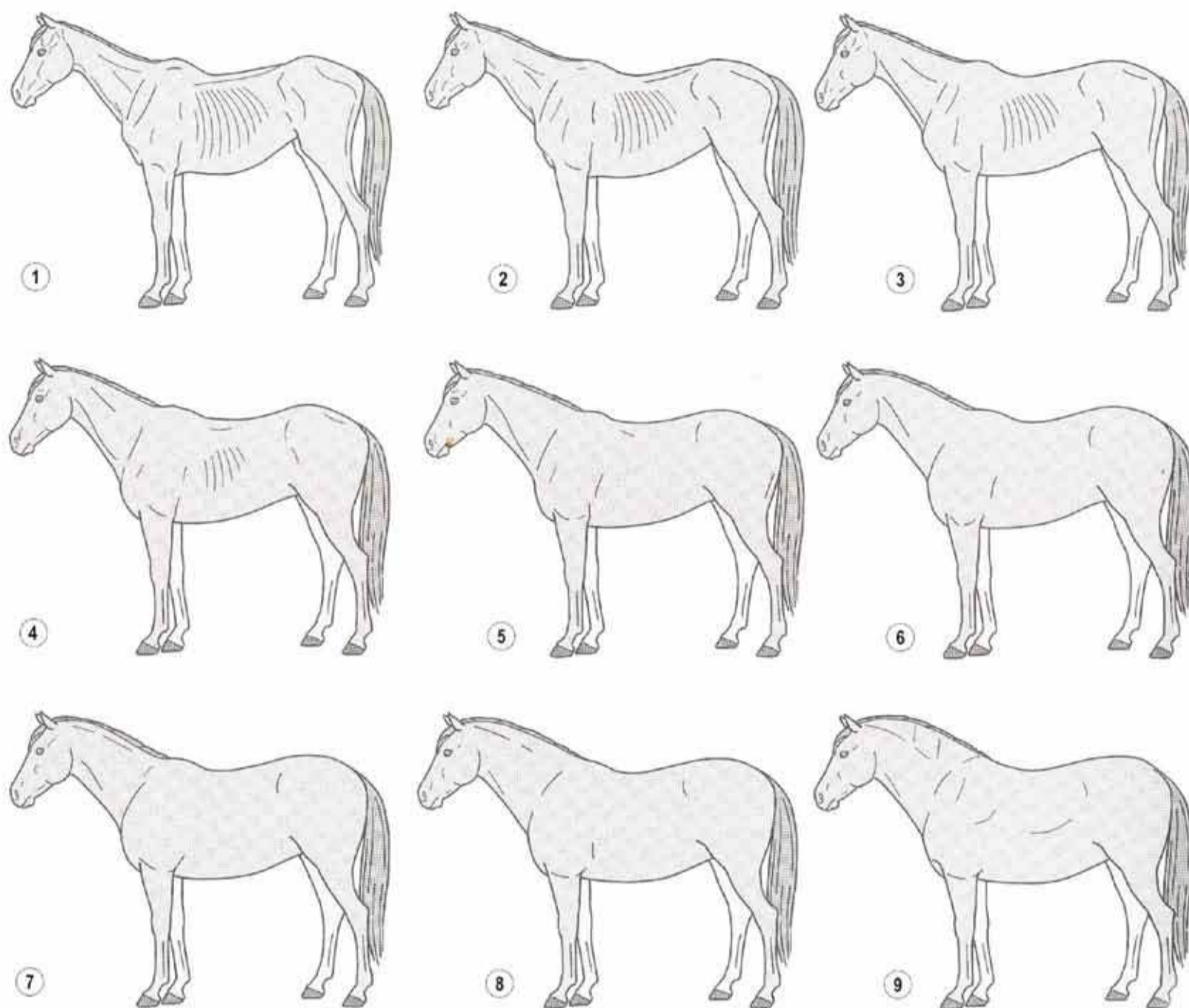
This Top Line Assessment has been developed by Baileys, in conjunction with Don Kapper of Progressive Nutrition, Ohio, USA, and is used in the States at Warmblood gradings to assess the overall muscle development of horses of all ages, focussing on the horse's top line (musculature) from the neck, over the withers and back to the hip and stifle area.

As a guide, a Top Line Assessment of Good to Excellent indicates that the horse's diet is supplying sufficient or optimum levels of good quality protein, whilst an assessment of Adequate to Poor indicates that the diet is supplying insufficient levels of quality protein to meet minimum requirements.

A strong healthy musculature and top line are essential if a horse is to perform to the best of his ability and can only be built by correct training if the diet supplies the necessary range of amino acids from good quality protein. Ensuring a horse's dietary protein requirements are met at all times will help maintain top line and muscle tone even during lay-off periods.

Grade	Visual Description
Excellent Diet providing optimum levels of quality protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This horse has ideal muscle development for its body type. The neck has a smooth or convex top line and blends smoothly into the shoulder and withers. Muscle is full each side of the withers and along the spinal column so that the vertebrae cannot be seen. The hip is full and the stifle muscles are defined. There is no hollowness between the hip and stifle.
Good Diet providing sufficient levels of quality protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This horse is adequately muscled although there are some areas of inadequacy. The neck has a straight top line and there is some hollowing where the neck meets the shoulder. There is hollowing each side of the withers and along the back. The hip to stifle area is flatter.
Adequate Diet may not be meeting horse's minimum protein requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The neck has a straight or concave top line and is weak. Muscle each side of the withers are sunken. Back and loin areas appear bony. Vertebrae will be higher than the muscles beside them. Muscling over the hip and hindquarter is adequate. The hip to stifle area is weak.
Poor Diet not meeting horse's minimum protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The neck has a concave top line and is hollowed. Poor concave muscling over the entire topline from withers to tail. The hip bones and the top of the vertebrae on the croup are pointed and the muscles between are sunken in. The width of the stifles is narrower than that of the hips.

BODY CONDITION SCORE



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BODY CONDITION SCORING

The Body Condition Scoring system used by Baileys is based on the American 1 – 9 system (adapted from Henneke et al 1983) which gives greater flexibility and detail for the score given. This looks at the neck, ribs and rump to assess the horse's overall condition and level of body fat which provides an indication of the calorie intake of the horse in question.

As a guide, a Body Condition Score of less than 4 would indicate that the horse's minimum calorie requirements are not being met by its diet, whilst one of more than 6 would indicate that its diet is supplying more calories than the horse requires which could lead to potential problems.

1	Poor Minimum calorie requirements not met	The horse is emaciated with spine, ribs, tail head, scapula and hips prominent with little or no flesh covering them
2	Very thin Minimum calorie requirements not met	Slight covering of flesh over scapula, spine and tail head. Ribs very prominent. Hollow through quarters, tucked up appearance in front of the stifle.
3	Thin Minimum calorie requirements not met	Hips and ribs slightly covered. Some hollowness through quarters and tucked up. Top line undeveloped, angular appearance.
4	Moderately thin Optimum calorie requirements not quite met	Outline of ribs discernible although covered. Scapula and hips covered. Neck reasonably well covered with some top line.
5	Moderate Optimum calorie requirements met	Ribs not easily distinguished but can be felt. Well muscled top line, shoulders and neck blend smoothly into body. Fat around tailhead feeling spongy. No hollowness through quarters.
6	Moderately fat Optimum calorie requirements slightly exceeded	May have slight crease down back. Fat over ribs feels spongy. Fat around tailhead feeling soft. Starting to deposit fat down withers and behind the shoulder.
7	Fleshy Calorie requirements exceeded	Crease down back becoming obvious. Difficult to feel ribs. Fat deposits on neck and behind shoulders becoming obvious.
8	Fat Calorie requirements exceeded	Definite crease down back and fatty "pads" around tail head and over shoulders and ribs. Apple shaped quarters!
9	Extremely fat Calorie requirements exceeded	Large fat pads along ribs, shoulder, neck and over quarters and tail head area. Obvious crease down back and apple shaped quarters.

BODY CONDITION SCORING

condition score 1 - 3



poor neck

condition score 4 - 6



moderate neck

condition score 7 - 9



fat neck



poor middle



moderate middle



fat middle



poor rear



moderate rear



fat rear

Condition Scoring helps to introduce some measure of objectivity into the assessment of a horse or pony's condition. The pictures above help illustrate states of condition and should act as a guide in assessing the condition of your own horse or pony. Remember, a horse's type or conformation as well as how he "does" will all have a bearing on how he looks - a flighty Thoroughbred, for

example, is unlikely to ever carry excessive condition. The art is to achieve the correct level of fitness and condition for the type and level of work required, and to the benefit of the horse's overall health. Just because a pony is retired does not mean he should be allowed to get excessively fat!

For expert, friendly advice on the benefits of a fully balanced diet contact one of our Nutrition team on: 01371 850 247 (option 2), e-mail: nutrition@baileymhorsefeeds.co.uk
www.baileymhorsefeeds.co.uk

