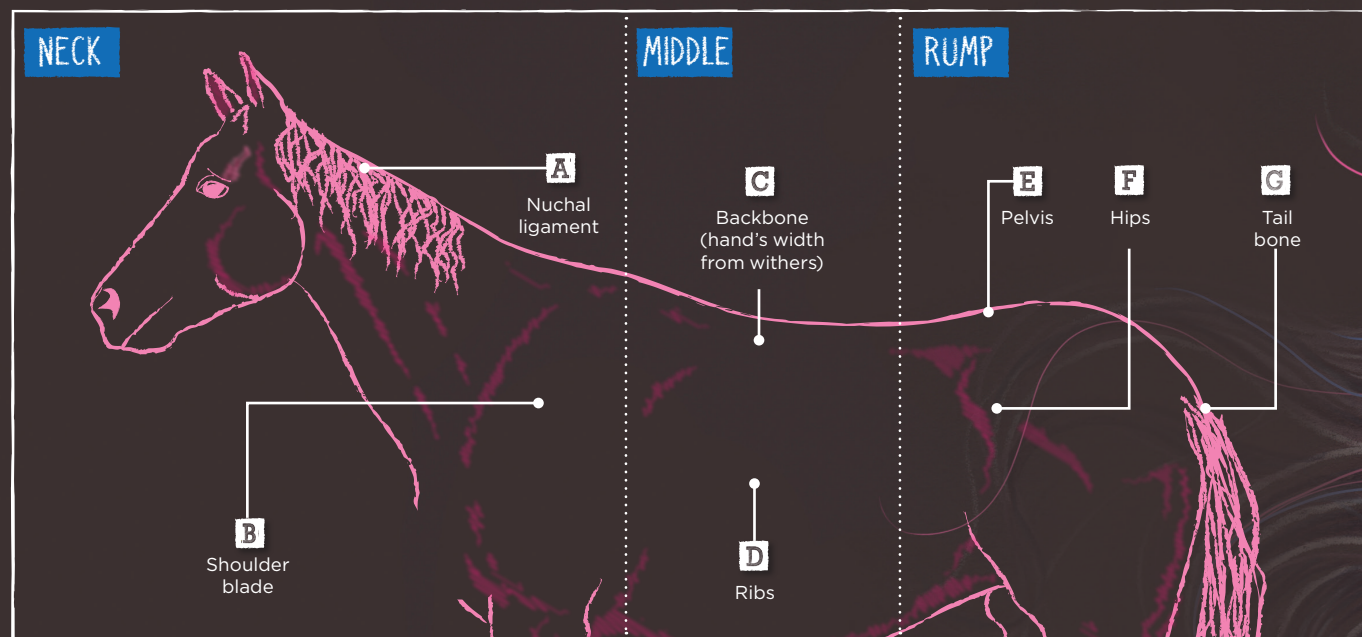


HOW TO USE THE BODY FAT SCORE (BFS) CHART

Equine Cushing's disease can cause unusual fat distribution in horses and ponies. If your horse has this disease an accurate assessment of their body fat can be an important tool in monitoring their response to treatment and deciding on nutritional changes within your management regime.

Regularly scoring three separate areas of your horse's body using the guide below, and recording these scores in their Care About Cushing's profile, is a good way to ensure that you and your vet are managing Equine Cushing's disease in the best way possible for your horse.

Firstly, ensure your horse is well restrained in a safe, well-lit area such as a stable. Make sure there is enough space for you to move freely around your horse. Then, working in a calm and quiet manner, observe and feel your horse's neck, middle and rump, paying attention to the landmarks described in the notes below. You should then assign a score between 0 and 5 to each of these three regions (see scoring chart overleaf).



As a general rule, you should be able to feel, but not see, the skeleton of the body (BFS 2-3). If you can see bones as well as feel them, then the horse has too little fat (BFS 0-1). If you cannot feel or see bones, then the horse has too much fat (BFS 4-5).

NECK

A Start by standing back and looking at the appearance of the neck. Does it bend upwards or downwards or is there no obvious bend to the neck?

Next touch the neck: does it feel soft or firm? Is there a crest? Does the crest feel firm or wobbly?

Then find the nuchal ligament by feeling behind your horse's poll. The nuchal ligament will feel like a firm, elastic band-like structure. Once you have found the nuchal ligament, with your thumb and forefinger, follow the ligament down the neck to the join with the withers. Can you feel the nuchal ligament between your thumb and forefinger all the way down the neck? Can you feel any fat over the ligament? If there is fat, can you pull this over the nuchal ligament? Is your horse sensitive to you feeling the nuchal ligament?

B Can you see the boney outline of your horse's shoulder blade, or is just the top or just the point (front) of the shoulder visible? **Touch your horse's shoulder:** can you feel the bones or are they well covered?

MIDDLE

C Look at your horse's topline: can you see their backbone or is the topline smooth and covered by fat and muscle? Is the skin sunken on each side of the backbone or is there a gutter running down the centre of the backbone? **Now place one hand behind your horse's withers, and lay your other hand next to it and relax your fingers.** When you lift your second hand are your fingers in a flat, curved or V-shape? **Now gently feel along the backbone:** can you feel the bones here?






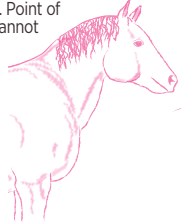
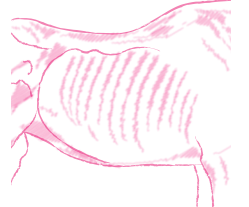



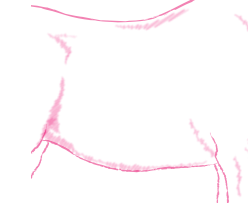

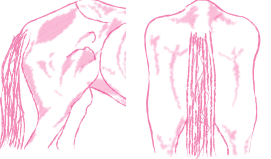
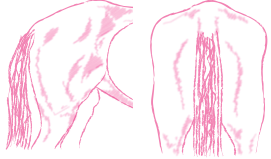
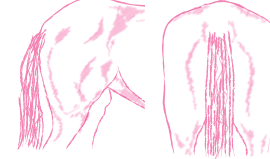
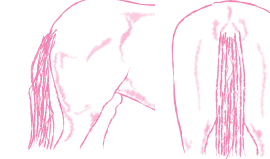
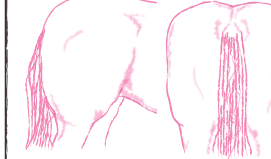

D Look at your horse's side over the ribcage: can you see the ribs? Is the skin tight across them? **Now run your hand firmly across your horse's ribcage:** can you feel the ribs? If so, are they easy to feel or do you have to push firmly to feel the ribs? Can you feel any fat behind the shoulder?

RUMP

E Does the croup have an angular, well-defined, or rounded appearance? **Carefully place your hand on top of your horse's rump to feel the pelvis:** can you feel it easily or do you have to push hard to feel it? Is the skin tight over this area? Does the pelvis have a rounded or angular appearance?

F Look at your horse's hips: are they rounded or angular? Can you feel the hip bones with your hands?

G Stand approximately 3 metres behind your horse's tail and (making sure that it is safe to do so) look at your horse's bottom. Is it narrow, rounded, or apple-shaped? Is there a cavity under the tail? Is there a gutter in the centre of the tail? Is there a fat pad on the tail head?

	SCORE 0	SCORE 1	SCORE 2	SCORE 3	SCORE 4	SCORE 5
NECK	<p>Neck bends upwards, and appears narrow and thin. The nuchal ligament is obviously visible and has no fat on top. There is no crest. The boney outline of the entire shoulder blade is visible with no fat coverage.</p> 	<p>Neck bends upwards, and appears narrow and thin. The nuchal ligament is visible, can be felt all the way down the neck, and has no fat on top. There is no crest. Only the top of the shoulder blade is visible with no fat coverage, but the shoulder blade can still be felt.</p> 	<p>No obvious bend to neck. The nuchal ligament is not visible, but can be felt all the way down the neck, and has no fat on top. Neck appears narrow and muscle can be felt. There is no crest. Shoulder blade is not visible but can easily be felt.</p> 	<p>Neck bends downwards. The nuchal ligament is not visible, but can be felt all the way down the neck and there is fat over the ligament. The neck is firm with visible muscle. No crest is present (except in stallions). The shoulder blade can be felt with a small amount of pressure.</p> 	<p>Neck bends downwards. The nuchal ligament is not visible and cannot be palpated all the way down the neck. Your horse may be sensitive to you feeling for this ligament. The neck feels softer to touch. A wide, spongy crest is present. The crest can be pulled over the nuchal ligament. Shoulder blades cannot be seen or felt, but the point of the shoulder can be felt.</p> 	<p>Neck bends downwards. The nuchal ligament is not visible and cannot be palpated. Your horse may be sensitive to you feeling for this ligament. The neck feels soft to touch. A marked crest is present which is wide and firm with fatty folds, and can be pulled over the nuchal ligament. Shoulder blades cannot be seen or felt. Point of the shoulder cannot be felt.</p> 
MIDDLE	<p>Backbone is very visible and prominent. Skin is sunken on each side of the backbone. When you lift your hand, it is a V-shape. Bones on the backbone can be felt easily. Skin is pulled tight over the ribs which are all clearly visible and can be easily felt.</p> 	<p>Backbone is visible and defined. Skin is sunken on each side of the backbone. When you lift your hand it is a V-shape. Bones on the backbone can be felt. Skin is tight over visible ribs which are visible and can easily be felt.</p> 	<p>Backbone is well-covered. When you lift your hand, it is a V-shape. Bones on the backbone can be felt. Ribs are only just visible, but can be felt.</p> 	<p>Backbone is not visible. No 'gutter' is visible along the back. When you lift your hand, it is curved. Bones on the backbone can just be felt. Ribs are covered but can be felt with light pressure.</p> 	<p>Backbone is not visible and the topline is smooth. Gutter is visible along the back. When you lift your hand, the fingers are slightly curled upwards. Ribs are not visible but can be felt with pressure and are covered by fat. Fat behind the shoulder can be felt.</p> 	<p>Backbone is not visible, topline is smooth. The back is flat with a deep gutter. When you lift your hand, it is C-shaped upwards. Ribs are well covered by fat and cannot be seen or felt. Fat behind the shoulder can be felt.</p> 
RUMP	<p>Croup is sunken and angular. Pelvis is visible, angular and easily felt, and skin is tight over this area. Angular hips with no fat coverage can be easily felt. Narrow bottom. Deep cavity under tail and each side of croup.</p> 	<p>Croup is sunken and angular. Pelvis is visible, angular and easily felt, and skin is tight over this area. Angular hips with little fat coverage can be easily felt. Narrow bottom. Cavity under tail.</p> 	<p>Croup is angular. Pelvis is visible, angular and can be felt, skin is not as tightly stretched over this area. Angular hips can be easily felt. Narrow bottom. Cavity under tail.</p> 	<p>Croup is well-defined but covered by muscle. Pelvis appears rounded, not obviously visible, but can be felt. Skin is not tight over this area. Hips appear rounded; not obviously visible, but can be felt. Rounded bottom. No cavity under tail.</p> 	<p>Croup is rounded. Pelvis is covered by soft fat, not visible, and felt only with pressure. Skin is not tight over this area. Hips appear rounded; not visible, but can be felt with pressure. Apple-shaped bottom. Gutter in centre of tail. No fat pad on tail head.</p> 	<p>Croup is rounded. Pelvis is buried under fat and cannot be seen or felt. Skin is not tight over this area. Hips cannot be seen or felt. Apple-shaped bottom. Deep gutter to tail with fat pad present on tail head.</p> 

GLOSSARY

croup: the top line of the hind quarters; **gutter:** a dip that can form along the length of the spine, appearing almost like a rain gutter, when a horse has excess fat; **nuchal ligament (crest):** the thick ligament that runs along the length of the neck - the layer of fat above and adjacent to the nuchal ligament is termed the 'crest'; **poll:** the very top part of the neck, between your horse's ears; **withers:** typically the highest point of your horse's backbone, at the bottom of the neck.