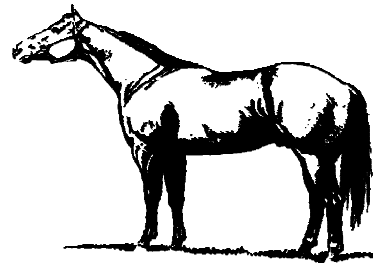


## **Animal Science Horse Information Series**

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### **BODY CONDITION SCORE for YOUR HORSE**

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The press constantly has advice on health issues for people, but what about the health of our equine friends? Just like humans, horses should not be too fat.

Horse owners have a practical method to evaluate the body condition of their horses. This system is a visual, hand-on method that determines a horse's body fat content. Horses can be given a Body Condition Score (BCS) from 1 to 9. A BCS of 1 is an emaciated horse, which is undesirable, and horses with a BCS of 1 or 2 are considered neglected or abused.

Horses with a BCS of 9 are obese, and those at an 8 are too fat. Horses are athletes, and a BCS of 8 or 9 is really not desirable. There is no ideal BCS for all horses, but many types and uses of horses do well at a BCS of 5.

The best location to evaluate BCS is over the horse's ribs. When the ribs cannot be seen but can be felt with slight pressure, the horse would be a BCS of 5. When a horse has a

**BCS of 5, the neck blends smoothly into the shoulders, the withers are rounded and the back is level with no ridge or crease. If the BCS is below a 5, the horse's ribs will be visible.**

**Most horses used for pleasure, such as trail riding and occasional showing, perform well at a BCS of 5 -7.5. A BCS of 7 or 7.5 is not detrimental to horses performing occasionally if they are properly conditioned for the activity.**

**Horses with too low or too high a BCS may not perform well for lack of energy or being too fat.**

**Intense performance horses such as race horses, polo ponies or 3-Day event horses may have a BCS of 4.5 to 5.5.**

**Horses with a BCS of 3 or less have not finished the Tevis Cup, a grueling, one-day, 100-mile endurance ride over mountainous conditions. As BCS decreases below 5, horses have lower energy reserves to complete such strenuous activities.**

**Horse owners can learn more about body condition scoring by obtaining a copy of the January/February/March issue of the Tennessee Horse Express from their county Extension office. One can view and print a copy at the University of Tennessee Department of Animal Science Web page at: <http://animalscience.ag.utk.edu>.**

**Additional horse related articles are also posted at this same Web address.**

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**4/05**