

Horse care & Knowledge Module Practical Outline.



Equine condition scoring

Body Condition Scoring is an ideal way to assess your horse's overall fat covering to help determine whether they are a healthy weight.

There are three key areas to consider; neck, body and hindquarters and you will need to look at and get hands on to help you determine between muscle and fat.

Fat will feel spongy whereas muscle is firmer. However, dangerous crest fat can start to feel hard and become difficult to move from side to side.

See 'Condition Scoring Resource' to help with scoring system.

Rugs

Recognise different types of rugs, how to put them on safely and when to use them.

- The turnout rug is designed to keep the horse warm and dry when out in the field during winter. It is a traditional waterproof turnout rug made from canvas or waxed cotton.
- Stable rugs are breathable, allowing perspiration to evaporate. Under blankets or liners can also be used underneath the stable rug to provide extra warmth to the horse.
- Equine fly rugs are designed to keep annoying flies, midges and other insects away from your equine. Lightweight and highly breathable materials ensure your equine stays cool and protected from bugs.
- A summer sheet is a light cotton rug that offers protection against dust and flies during the summer. They are often used as a light stable rug or travel rug.
- An exercise sheet designed for use whilst riding on wet or cold days. Made from a waterproof and breathable ballistic nylon outer with a bonded fleece lining.
- A fleece rug is breathable and warm and can be used as a light stable rug, a travel rug, an under rug or as a substitute for a cooler rug.
- The Thermatex Wicking Rug is a multipurpose rug for equines. Its wicking properties mean that equines dry quickly and stay warm. It is a useful rug to use after exercise, bathing and for travelling.
- It is important to remember not all horses need to be rugged and several factors need to be considered when deciding whether to rug a horse (age, breed, condition, clip etc.) Choosing not to rug can be helpful in weight management.

Loading an equine

Get the equine ready to load and if possible, practice correct loading and unloading on a trailer and/or lorry. Some groups may feel they don't need to do this if they don't take the horses out to competitions, however, there may come a time when they need to travel a horse to the vet in an emergency. Making sure each equine loads could save time when loading is vital.

An equine should always wear a good quality, ideally leather, headcollar that fits correctly. A Poll guard, to protect the top of the equine's head from injury, while tail bandages / guards are important to prevent damage and rubbing to the tail.

- Leg protection can be provided in the form of bandages or purpose made leg protectors/travel boots.
- Equines get hot when travelling due to the excitement of going somewhere but also being in a confined space so don't over rug.
- Options for travelling – Horse Lorry or trailer.
- Loading an equine – Those loading an equine must be confident in doing so and happy to handle the equine. They should also be dressed in suitable clothing, practical boots/wellies, ideally gloves and hat on.

Take and record the pulse, respiration rate and temperature of a horse at rest

If you know your horses well and you feel something is not quite right, one of the things you can check easily is its pulse rate, respiration rate and temperature. If you are ever unsure that any of these signs are not as they should be, give your vet a call. If a horse's respiration rate is high due to heavy exercise, it is important to walk the horse off until a reduction to normal can be measured.

- How to take a pulse / heart rate safely (around 30-40 beats per minute is normal);
 - Use only fingertips, (not thumb) and start with light pressure then increase if pulse is not felt.
 - If taking pulse at knee or lower, keep spare hand on equine's body and head/eyes facing forward to prevent accidents. Never Kneel!
 - Count the beats for just 15 seconds and then multiply by 4 to get BPM.
 - Unlike a vein, the arteries have thick walls and are often easy to see.
 - A stethoscope can be used to listen to the heart rate but is not necessary since the heart rate can be felt easily.
 - The pulse rate and heart rate should be rhythmic, if not call your vet.
- How to take the respiration rate (8-12 breaths per minute):
 - Can be performed without touching the equine, from a distance or standing at either side of the equine.
 - Remove any rugs or sheets, but you do not need to remove tack.
 - On a cold day you can watch for breath coming from the nostrils, but this will only give you the rate and not indicate any effort being used.
 - Stand at the equine's shoulder at arms-length from the equine and watch the widest part of the ribcage (just in-front of the hind leg). For safety stand at the shoulder but you can get a good view when looking from the hind end towards the front.
 - You should be able to see the ribcage raise and fall (count a rise and fall as one breath).

- It is normal to see a mix of both deep and shallow breaths, when at rest
- If the horse is excitable and breathing hard from obvious recent exercise, it is safest to stay at the head to count. The breaths will be obvious by watching the nostrils flare.
- If you have a calm rugged or very hairy equine and find it difficult to see the ribcage movement, it is possible to hold the back of a bare hand just below the nostril and feel the breaths. Keep your hand far enough away to not touch the whiskers.
- Temperature –37.5 to 38.5 (notice there is only a 1-degree range). Fahrenheit range is 99 to 101.
 - To take an equine's temperature use a rubber tipped digital thermometer for safety and ease, lubricate with Vaseline / KY Gel, stand to the side of the equine to prevent being kicked (if this is the first time you have taken the equine's temperature, it is best to have a holder control the equine on the same side as you and stand the equine with its opposite side against the wall. (Take your time).
 - Push the tail to the side away from you and use the other hand to insert the thermometer slowly with slight twisting movement, hold the thermometer to the sidewall of the bottom until it beeps and read immediately. Wipe the thermometer clean and be aware that sometimes if the thermometer is in the poop, it will show a false, lower reading.
 - Please be gentle and practise at home to allow your equine to become comfortable. This is an important skill to learn and will help you assess your equine for any signs of illness.