

# ESSEX HORSE & PONY PROTECTION SOCIETY

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## WEIGHT CONTROL

Overweight ponies (and horses) are in danger of developing equine metabolic syndrome (similar to diabetes) and are at increased risk of laminitis. It is therefore important to ensure you keep a check on your pony's weight.

You should be able to feel your pony's ribs and his crest should feel soft. There should not be any excessive fat pads on the neck or shoulders. When viewed from behind, the spine should be just prominent or level with the quarters. There should not be a dip or gully along the back.

- Monitor weight weekly with weigh tape (placed around the girth area and pulled fairly tight) or weighbridge. Failing this, use a piece of string to ensure weight is reducing and not increasing!
- Weigh haynets (before soaking) using a spring balance.
- Restrict grazing – strip graze/use muzzle/restrict time out.
- If using a muzzle, introduce gradually so that your pony does not become frustrated. Feed strips of carrot up through the gaps to help him realise that he can still eat with it on.
- Trickle feed, ie little and often. Do not leave for prolonged periods without any feed, otherwise he could develop ulcers.
- Soak the hay for an hour to reduce the sugar content and use a haynet with small holes. To further increase the time it takes for the pony to eat his hay, use two haynets, one inside the other.
- Make sure he always has access to fresh water.
- Use a laminitic feed balancer (eg Blue Chip Lamilite or Baileys Lo Cal) either alone or mixed with a small handful of unmolassed chaff, such as Happy Hoof or Healthy Tummy, to ensure he is receiving sufficient nourishment. No other short feed should be necessary.
- Make sure he is not eating his bed! If he is, then change the bedding to something he is not tempted to eat.
- Allow ponies to lose weight during the winter, as they would do in the wild.
- Only rug when absolutely necessary.
- Exercise regularly. Lunge if you do not have time to ride, or walk out in hand.
- Treat your pony as an individual. If you have other horses or ponies which do not need to lose weight, be sure not to feed your tubby pony the same way just because it is easier.
- Limit titbits – apples and carrots contain sugar!
- Do not think you are being kind by over-feeding your pony. The opposite is true.
- Above all, do not give up. Your efforts will be rewarded by having a happier, healthier pony.