

Monitoring Body Condition in Horses: Helpful Smart Phone Apps for Horse Owners

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Maintaining proper body condition is vital to horse health, performance, and welfare. The Body Condition Scoring (BCS) scale developed by Dr. Henneke is a method of evaluating the amount of fat on a horse's body. This system is used by equine nutritionists, veterinarians, agriculture law enforcement personnel, horse farm managers, and horse owners to accurately assess a horse's condition. The scale ranges from one to nine, with 1 being very thin and 9 being obese. The level of condition is evaluated based on visual assessment and palpation of fat deposits. The areas of the horse's body emphasized in BCS are shown in (Figure 1).

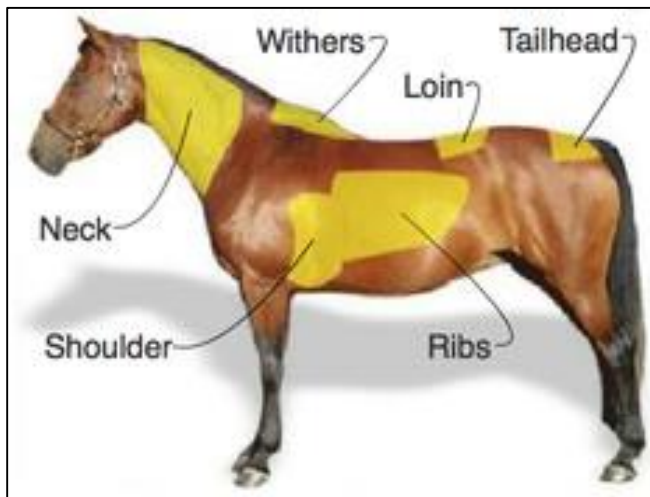


Figure 1. Areas of the horse's body used to evaluate and assign a body condition score (BCS). Image courtesy of the eXtension Horses BCS App.

The ideal BCS for a given horse should be 5 to 6 out of 9, however the recommended body condition score may vary depending on the stage of production. For example, horses in heavy race training would be expected to have a BCS of 4 to 5, and a BCS of 6 is considered ideal for broodmares entering the breeding season. Many factors can affect a horse's body condition including food availability, exercise/work activities, season/weather, parasites, dental problems, and feeding management practices. Becoming familiar with how to evaluate body condition and including BCS monitoring as part of your management will allow you to keep your horse(s) at a healthy weight. Assessing your horse(s) condition can help you more quickly identify and alert your veterinarian to potential problems.

Newly developed tools are available to assist horse owners and farm managers with recording and monitoring BCS in horses. The Horse BCS App developed by eXtension Horses is available

for Smart Phones through iTunes and Google Play for a cost of \$1.99. The app includes both learn and score features as well as video tutorials on how to assess BCS. The app allows you to take a picture of the horse and to assign a score taking into account each of the six areas of the horse's body used to evaluate BCS. The picture and BCS are date stamped and archived for future reference allowing comparison between previous and later scores (e.g. at different time points throughout the year). Other useful BCS and body weight calculator apps for horses include the Horse Health Tracker App developed by Equine Guelph (<http://www.equineguelph.ca/Tools/app.php>), and the Healthy Horse App developed by the University of Minnesota (<http://www.extension.umn.edu/agriculture/horse/apps/>).

References

eXtension. Body Condition Scoring Apps for Horses.

<http://www.extension.org/pages/71173/body-condition-scoring-apps-for-horses#.VdtdQ02FPIU>

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