How does your donkey score?
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Just like humans, many of our animal friends are suffering from waistline expansion. As with humans, being over weight increases the risk of health related concerns. Two of the most common problems seen in donkeys are laminitis (founder) and hyperlipidemia (fatty liver). Also, from a visual standpoint, when a donkey is grossly over weight, its neck becomes very wide and heavy, its back becomes lumpy and it may seem to have lumps on its rear end. These are all stores of excessive fat. If it becomes heavy enough, the neck crest will fall to one side and despite a successful return to a normal weight, the crest will never return to normal.

So how does you donkey score? Similar to horses, a donkey's body condition is scored on a 9-point scale. The ideal score is about a 5. If your donkey is greater than a 6.5, it is overweight. If it is less than a 4.0, it is underweight.

Using the following chart as a guideline to determine your donkeys score?

BODY CONDITION SCORING OF DONKEYS

Body condition scoring of donkeys can be done on a scale from 1-9.

Note: The spinous processes are the bony points rising from the spine (backbone). The superspinous muscle is the muscle along either side of the backbone.
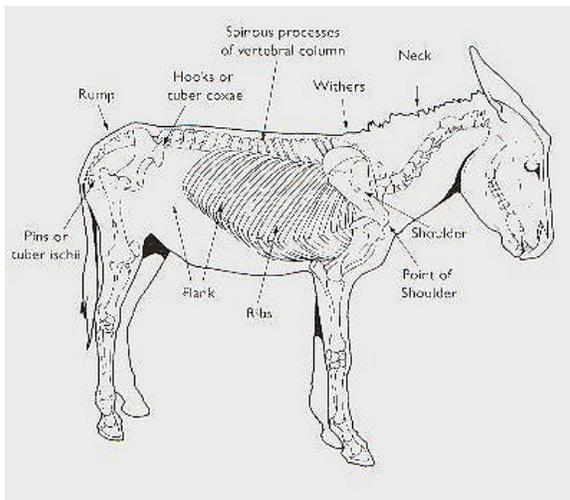
If your donkey is overweight, it is important that weight reduction occurs gradually. Sudden weight loss can cause your donkey to develop hyperlipidemia that even with aggressive treatment has the potential for at least a 50% mortality. If you have questions or concerns about how your donkey scores or an appropriate ration for your donkey, contact your veterinarian.

The summer newsletter will continue the discussion of the risks of obesity in your donkey

SCORE	DESCRIPTION OF THE DONKEY
1. Very thin	Animal markedly emaciated: bone structure easily seen over body; little muscle present; animal weak, lethargic
2. Thin	Animal emaciated; individual spinous processes, ribs, hooks, pins, shoulder blades and spine all prominent, sharply defined; some muscle development; neck thin; prominent withers; shoulders sharply angular
3. Less thin	Vertebral column prominent and individual spinous processes can be felt; little fat, but superspinous muscle over spinous processes apparent; ribs, pins and hooks prominent; loin area and rump concave; little muscle or fat covering over withers and shoulders
4. Less than moderate	Vertebral column visible; pins can be felt but not visible; hooks rounded but visible; rump flat rather than concave; ribs can be felt but not obvious; withers, shoulders and neck have some muscle and fat cover; shoulder blades less clearly defined
5. Moderate	Superspinous muscles developed and readily apparent; vertebral column can be felt; hooks rounded; rump rounded, convex; pins not visible; some fat can be felt in shoulder are region and at base of neck; can feel ribs, but not visible
6. More than moderate	Cannot feel spinous processes easily; back becoming flat well covered; rump convex and well muscled; some fat can be felt on neck, base of neck and shoulder area; neck filled into shoulder; hooks just visible
7. Less fat	Back flat; cannot feel spinous processes; hooks just visible; flat on neck and shoulder area beginning to expand over ribs; flanks filling, neck thickening
8. Fat	Animal appears well covered with body rounded with fat and bones not discernible; flanks filled, broad back
9. Very fat (obese)	Bones buried in fat; back broad or flat, in some cases crease along the backbone; large accumulations of fat on neck, over shoulder area and ribs; flank filled with fat

This table and figure come from *R. Anne Pearson & Mohammed Ouassat. 2000. A guide to live weight estimation and body condition scoring of donkeys*: 15-16