



Starving fatties to make them slimmer is not the best approach if your horse or pony "gets fat on thin air"



'fat club' tips for waistline control



Losing weight is tough and it's even tougher if you're an animal like the horse that is designed to spend most of its life eating. Stop your horse eating for too long and he may end up with serious health and behavioural problems, let him eat though and you could be dealing with obesity and laminitis. Finding the happy medium is what managing a good doer is all about and hopefully the following tips will help you to keep your horse in good shape both mentally and physically.

If there really isn't anyone else to help then try and put the hay in small holed nets, put one net inside another and put several nets around the stable so it takes as long as possible for your horse to extract the hay. Whilst hay should always be clean and dust free, choose a stalkier one, which has less leaf and therefore fewer calories, and avoid haylage if you can as its nutrients are much more readily available than those in hay.

Confined Quarters

The digestive tract of the horse functions most efficiently with an almost constant supply of fibrous material passing through, which pushes out any gas bubbles that have formed during its fermentation and digestion. If the horse is receiving very little to eat in an attempt to try and control his weight, then the gas can accumulate, causing the gut to become distended which is very painful and may result in colic symptoms. The other problem with enclosing good doers with very little to eat, is the risk of them developing "stereotypies" or stable vices, like crib biting, wind sucking or weaving.

Horses are physiologically "programmed" to live in a herd and spend the majority of their time eating and chewing so denying them these natural behaviours can cause anxiety and stress, which can be expressed as "stereotypical behaviour". Research is suggesting that some stereotypies are a response to increased acidity in the

digestive tract. When the horse chews he produces saliva which contains bicarbonate that helps to neutralise the acidity in the gut. If a horse isn't receiving much fibre he won't be spending very long chewing so the gut may remain very acidic which causes discomfort and can lead to the development of ulcers. For this reason antacids are gaining popularity for use in horses with stereotypical behaviours.

Get Creative!

You may need to be creative in order to both restrict your good-doer's calorie intake whilst still keeping a steady supply of fibre passing through his gut. If you leave him with his night time hay at 5pm and then don't return until 8am the next morning, the chances are that your horse will spend from 5.45pm until 8am without anything at all. This is really too long to be without some source of fibre, so if you know someone goes to the yard much later, why not ask them to put a haynet in when they leave?

Limited Grazing

In the summer when most horses are enjoying lots of time in the field, the poor old good doer either has to spend more time in the stable or in the confines of a bare yard or paddock. It may be the safest place for the overweight horse to be, in terms of avoiding obesity and laminitis, but it does mean that they miss out on a lot of valuable nutrients that grass contains. Although hay and haylage provide an alternative fibre source, they do not provide as many nutrients as grass and, as many people tend not to feed their good-doer at all in the summer, it can mean that they miss out on certain nutrients. There are various ways to provide these nutrients as most manufacturers now have a feed designed for good-doers.

An easy and cost effective option is to feed a balancer, like Baileys Lo-Cal, which provides a concentrated source of nutrients, including quality protein, vitamins and minerals, without the calories that are found in a normal mix or cube. This is formulated to be



fed in small quantities, either on its own or with a low calorie chaff, such as Baileys Light Chaff, so you can feed a small feed without giving him many calories.

Chaff-based feeds with added nutrients are popular but should be fed in much larger volumes to ensure the horse receives his “full quota” of nutrients, like vitamins and minerals. Whichever type of product you choose, it is important to feed the levels recommended by the manufacturer or your horse may still not be receiving the nutrient levels he or she requires. For those who prefer not to feed, or in situations where it is not easy, a vitamin and mineral lick, like Baileys Feed Block, allows free choice access to essential nutrients, again, without the calories.

I just give my horse a handful of mix or cubes to keep him happy

This is one of the most common feeding strategies employed by owners of overweight horses and ponies, however, as these feeds are designed to be fed in much greater quantities, a handful provides very few of the vitamins and minerals the horse needs and some calories that he doesn't need. A much better option is to feed the recommended amount of Baileys Lo-Cal, with as much or as little Light Chaff as you choose, so you can still give your “fatty” a small feed without it going straight to his waistline!

Nutrient	Amount provided by 500g of a high fibre, low energy mix	Amount provided by 500g (two mugs) of Lo-Cal balancer
Lysine	1.75g	6.25g
Calcium	4g	15g
Copper	175mg	875mg
Zinc	40mg	1875mg

I have a lazy, overweight horse. What do I do?

One of the most common problems with good-doers is that they also tend to be lazy but feeding them more energy (calories) increases the risk of weight gain, which can make the laziness worse. Increasing their activity level, along with controlling their calorie intake, should encourage weight loss which may result in higher energy levels without the need to change the diet. However, it is vital to ensure that the diet is balanced as, quite often, a good-doer's lethargy is due to a lack of nutrients, like vitamins and minerals, and they tend to feel better and have more energy once the diet has been balanced.

If this doesn't generate more enthusiasm for work then it is possible to combine a low calorie balancer with oats to try to generate a little more “sparkle”. Feeding the correct amount of balancer daily ensures a balanced diet, whilst the quantity of oats can be adjusted according to the horse's workload and requirements. When the horse isn't working as hard, the oats can be reduced right down to a handful so that extra calories are not being added when they're not needed.

Make sure that, if you try adding oats, you introduce them very slowly as they can have quite a strong effect on some horses and ponies. This feeding regime works very well with competition horses, particularly Warmblood dressage horses, as they are often good-doers but still need lots of energy for the work that they do.

Before and After

If you feel that your horse needs to go on a diet, prepare a fitness and diet plan. It is a good idea to keep a record of your horse's measurements so get yourself a weighttape and measure your horse each week – make sure you are consistent when you measure e.g. at the same time of day and with the tape in the same place each time. Take a photo before you start so that you can refer back to it as small changes day by day are hard to see, whereas if you look back after a couple of weeks you should be able to see more of a change. If you have implemented a good exercise programme and a suitable diet you should find that the weight starts to come off.

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Do's & Don'ts

DO

- Feed a clean but less nutritious stalkier hay (that hurts your palm if you scrunch it in your hand) which takes some chewing but provides fewer calories than a leafier hay
- Feed hay/haylage in small-holed nets to make it last longer
- Restrict grazing but not fibre intake
- Feed a balancer, like Lo-Cal or Performance Balancer, to ensure all vitamin, mineral and protein requirements are met
- Increase exercise, where possible
- Prepare a fitness and diet plan

DON'T

- Feed small handfuls of a coarse mix or cube to keep your good-doer happy
- Leave your good-doer cooped up all day
- Restrict access to forage for long periods
- Starve a good-doer



For further information or a practical and individual diet for your horse, contact one of Baileys Nutrition team on 01371 850 247 (option 2) e: nutriton@baileyshorsefeeds.co.uk www.baileyshorsefeeds.co.uk