



Nutrition Update

Cresty Neck Scoring: How to?







Dr. Tania Cubitt

Obesity is associated with insulin resistance in horses and ponies. Overweight horses also have an increased risk of laminitis, and overweight mares have decreased reproductive function. Human studies show that regional fat deposition, such as abdominal fat, is more predictive of metabolic disease than overall body fat. Currently the most common system for assessing a horse's fatness is using body condition scoring (1-9 scale). This method determines overall fatness of horses, but does not differentiate between specific regions of fat. Like abdominal fat in humans, neck crest fat in horses has been suggested to be associated with insulin resistance and increased risk for laminitis. Recent research has developed a novel scoring system for grading neck crest fatness. The "cresty neck scoring system" is on a scale of 0 to 5 where a score of zero equals no visual appearance of a crest and a score of five equals enormous and permanently drooping to one side. Like the current overall body condition scoring system the cresty neck system is subjective and requires experience in learning to judge condition and practice to obtain consistent values.

Even with these limitations the cresty neck scoring system has been proven to be a valuable tool when predicting a horse's risk of metabolic disease. An increase in cresty neck score was associated with an increase in circulating insulin and a decrease in insulin sensitivity in the equines studied. These factors potentially amplify the animals risk for an array of metabolic diseases including laminitis.

Points to consider when implementing any condition scoring system are that horse owners should be trained by someone with experience at scoring animals i.e. your local feed company representative or equine nutritionist. Also the same person should be assessing the horse each time to be consistent and account for variation between people. Perhaps taking a monthly photograph of your horse in the same position each time (best in front of a blank wall) would help assess increases or decreases in your horses' condition.

It is crucial to find convenient, easy to use methods for the assessment of regional fatness. While body condition scoring is an accepted method for assessment of overall fatness, neck scoring can standardize the assessment of regional fat distribution on the crest of the neck. This system will provide critical information to horse owners so they can proactively manage their equines to reduce the risk of them contracting these devastating diseases.

	Score	Description
	0 No palpable crest.	
	1 No visual appearance of a crest, but slight filling felt with palpation.	
	2 Noticeable appearance of a crest, but fat deposited fairly evenly from poll to withers. Crest easily cupped in one hand and bent from side to side.	
	3 Crest enlarged and thickened, so fat is deposited more heavily in middle of the neck than toward poll and withers, giving a mounded appearance. Crest fills cupped hand and begins losing side to side flexibility.	
	4 Crest grossly enlarged and thickened, and can no longer be cupped in one hand or easily bent from side to side. Crest may have wrinkles or creases per-pendicular to the topline.	
	5 Crest is so large it permanently droops to one side.	

When dealing with horses or ponies with a CNS of 4 or 5 we must be cautious of feeding diets high in sugar and starch as these may make worse any underlying risk for metabolic disease. Poulin grain offers an ideal feed choice for horses that are at risk of contracting metabolic disorders such as Laminitis, Cushings, Chronic Obesity, Insulin Resistance and Tying Up. EQUI-PRO™ Carb-Safe is specifically designed with less than 10 % starch and sugar, and no grains or molasses to target horses that are sensitive or intolerant to high carbohydrate feeds. This feed is balanced for vitamins and minerals and contains live yeast culture for improved fiber digestion. Another feeding option is EQUI-PRO™ MVP Pellet. This low intake protein, vitamin and mineral supplement provides essential nutrients without an abundance of calories.



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