



FatBusting

Many column inches have been written in the equine press over the past couple of months on the hot topic of overweight horses. Societies and charities such as the BHS, and Laminitis Trust, have taken the issue on board, and are currently actively promoting the need for fit, healthy horses.

Obesity in horses is rapidly becoming as common a talking point as obesity in humans. All are highlighting the detrimental long term problems, and balancing these against weight loss solutions.

Unsurprisingly, it's the showing judges who are taking the brunt of the criticism for continually placing overweight and obese horses in the ribbons, as well as the breeders for producing them. However, ongoing correspondence in the equine press indicates there is a gradual swing away from this practise and, without doubt, vets, farriers and nutritionists welcome this on-going change.

Certainly, keeping weight off obese animals is not easy, particularly with sedentary horses. Most humans tend to be unhappy when losing weight themselves and automatically assume the horse will also suffer during the weight loss process. This need not be true and, as long as energy expenditure is greater than energy input (through calories), the horse will lose weight successfully.

Nutrition

Depending on the type of work the horse is undertaking, the first question has to be whether or not the horse requires any concentrates at all. Spring and autumn grass should provide sufficient nutrition for the horse at maintenance or in light work.

Obviously this depends on the state of the pasture as overgrazing is a false economy; fresh grass growth can be retarded or even prevented and weed growth such as docks become prevalent in over stocked paddocks.

For working horses, prone to weight gain, a grazing muzzle fitted to manufacturer's instructions is recommended. Limited grass intake will therefore allow a concentrate to be fed to provide adequate energy for work required .



Maintenance to light work

Hickstead Hi Fibre Cubes, with a fibre content of just under 20%, provide an excellent source of fibre to maintain a healthy gut and the change from a predominately grass diet (particularly when grass quality declines during the hot summer months) will not cause any upsets. These low calorie cubes are ideal for all horses, including natives. The presence of super fibres, together with excellent levels of minerals and vitamins, promote a suitable diet for horses at maintenance or light work.

For horses in light to medium work

Hickstead Paddock Cubes or Mix also have high fibre levels, containing super fibres and having a higher energy level than the Hi Fibre Cubes, so they will cater perfectly for the working horse.

For horses working at higher levels

Hickstead Eventa Sports Mix and **Jumpa Sports Cubes** contain excellent levels of energy and are suitable for competing horses. By feeding little and often, energy levels will be kept high and these feeds are particularly suitable for lazy horses. As with any new feed, introduce to the diet slowly and increase work load before levels of feed.

To find out more about **Hickstead Horse Feeds**, their range of feeds and forage analysis service, or for friendly, professional feeding advice, phone 0845 0250 444.