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Isle of Man Government  
Code of practice for the  
welfare of

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# Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their hybrids

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**Isle of Man**  
Government

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# Understanding the Animal Welfare Act 2023

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Owning and caring for a horse can be a source of great enjoyment but it is also a big responsibility with a long-term caring and financial commitment. The Animal Welfare Act ("the Act") requires you to ensure that any horse, pony, donkey or mule for which you are responsible, whether on a permanent or a temporary basis:

- has a suitable environment to live in;
- has a healthy diet (including fresh clean water)
- is able to behave normally;
- has appropriate company; and
- is protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

It is your responsibility to fully understand your horse's welfare needs and what the law requires you to do to meet those needs. Breach of a provision of the Code is not an offence in itself, but if proceedings are brought against you for a welfare offence the Court will look at whether or not you have complied with the Code in deciding whether you have committed an offence. You should not cause any unnecessary suffering to your or any other animal; this could constitute a serious offence under Manx legislation. Further advice should be sought from a veterinary surgeon who can provide advice on horse welfare, particularly health, or an appropriately qualified and experienced horse care specialist. Other sources of information are listed at the end of this code.

Throughout this Code of Practice the term "vet" will be used to refer to a veterinary surgeon and the term "Suitably Qualified Person" or "SQP" will be used to refer to a person who is permitted to prescribe and supply some veterinary medicines in the UK/Isle of Man, most of which have preventive uses (e.g. anti-parasitic medicines, farm animal vaccines and nutritional supplements).

In this Code "Equine" or "Equidae" is intended to cover all:

- Domestic horses and ponies (including feral and semi feral ponies); donkeys; and hybrids (including mules).
- Where the word "horse" is used in this Code, the reference applies to all Equidae.
- If information relates to donkeys specifically, reference to donkeys will be made.
- For the purpose of this Code, a "keeper" means a person who has day-to-day charge of the horse.
- You will also find reference in the code to "experienced horse professionals". These are people who, through qualification or experience, can provide expert advice on welfare and some aspects of equine health.

Under the Act animal owners and keepers are under a legal duty of care for the animals for which they are responsible on a permanent or temporary basis. A person could therefore be responsible for an animal if they own it or are in charge of it. An owner has ongoing responsibility for their animal even if another person is in charge of it.

# Understanding the Animal Welfare Act 2023

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Before taking on a horse potential owners or keepers need to consider a number of important issues to ensure that they will be able to meet their duty of care towards the horse. You should consider how much experience you have and whether you have the practical skills and knowledge to care for a horse properly. The purchase cost of a horse is likely to be minimal compared to the ongoing costs of care over the horse's lifetime.

The Code of Practice on the Welfare of Horses is made by Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA) under section 6(5) of the Animal Welfare Act and come into operation on the same date as the commencement of the Act.

This code has been adapted from the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses issued by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with their permission under the terms of the open government licence version 3.

If you have a concern about the welfare of any animal that is under the care of a person, please contact the animal health team at the department of environment, food and agriculture. Telephone number 01624 685844 or [agriculture@gov.im](mailto:agriculture@gov.im). If you are concerned about animal cruelty please contact the police.



# How to provide a suitable environment for your horse

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This section offers guidance on providing your horse with a suitable place to live.

## Shelter

Not all horses will need a stable/housing. Some horses, particularly native breeds, are capable of living outdoors throughout the year, provided they can obtain shelter from the prevailing winds, summer sun and flies. Shelter can be natural (for example trees or hedges) or man-made (such as a field shelter) depending on the field environment and type of horse. Living outdoors in a social group may be better for some horses than living inside. However, where horses are of less hardy breeding (e.g. Thoroughbreds), clipped, very young or elderly they may require stable accommodation/housing or other shelter to protect them from the cold and damp or very hot weather. Any horse may need stabling at short notice should they become sick or injured and provision should be made for this in advance of an emergency arising. Donkeys have specific needs for roofed shelters with solid walls and clean, dry areas on which to stand, as they are not well adapted to wet and cold conditions.

## Pasture

The area of pasture required per horse will depend on the type of grass, ground conditions, time of year, type of horse and degree of pasture management employed. As a general rule, each horse requires approximately 0.5 – 1.0 hectares (or 1.25 to 2.5 acres) of grazing of a suitable quality if no supplementary feeding is being provided. Each donkey requires a minimum of 0.2 – 0.4 hectares (a half to one acre). A smaller area may be adequate where a horse is principally housed and grazing areas are used only for occasional turnout. If stabling or a yard area is not available, a safely enclosed area of hard standing should be available to facilitate routine and emergency treatment, such as farriery, dentistry and veterinary attention.

A good pasture management programme is necessary to avoid over-grazing, aid worm control, maintain good drainage and control weeds. This includes, for example, picking up droppings, rotating grazing areas and where possible removing horses when the ground is very wet to prevent poaching (where the pasture is broken into wet muddy patches by the action of the horse's feet on the wet ground) and health problems such as mud fever.

In muddy conditions it is important that a horse has an adequately sized, well drained area in the pasture on which to stand and lie down, and on which to be fed and watered.

Fields should be kept clear of dangerous objects and poisonous plants.

Some plants and trees (e.g. including privet, yew and laburnum) are also extremely toxic to horses, therefore horses should not have access to these (or their clippings) at any time. Grass cuttings are not suitable for horses to eat and care should be taken that horses do not gain access to these (i.e. garden waste or cut fields). Owners and keepers should ensure that they make themselves aware of which plants are poisonous to horses and take steps to prevent their animals ingesting these. Some plants pose a particular risk in certain seasons (e.g. sycamore tree seeds and oak trees which are most dangerous in the autumn when they shed their acorns) so arrangements should be made to mitigate such seasonal risks.

# How to provide a suitable environment for your horse

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Ragwort is toxic to horses and ingestion can result in fatal liver damage. Horses will eat living or cut ragwort. All species of ragwort and all parts of the plant are toxic to horses and humans, even when cut, pulled, treated or wilted.

Fences should be of sturdy construction, strong enough and of sufficient height to prevent horses from escaping (for example higher fences may be required for stallions) and designed, constructed and maintained to avoid the risk of injury, with no sharp projections. Gateways should be designed to allow for the easy and safe passage of horses, and gates should be fastened securely to prevent injury and escape. In some situations gates may need to be padlocked. Barbed wire/ sheep wire ideally should not be used in fields used by horses and where plain wire is used, measures should be taken to ensure it is sufficiently visible to the horse. If because of the cross grazing of other stock the use of barbed wire or sheep wire is essential it should be kept tight and well maintained. Sheep wire is available with gaps that are smaller at the bottom which is much less likely to injure a horse.

The height of fences required will depend on the horses being kept in the field. The British Horse Society (BHS) generally recommends that fences should be 1.25m (4ft) high more specifically:

- Horses: fence height should be 1.08m to 1.38m (3ft 6ins to 4ft 6ins)
- Ponies: fence height should be 1m to 1.3m (3ft 3ins to 4ft 3ins)
- Lower rail (in both cases): height should be 0.5m (1ft 6ins) above ground
- Stallions: fence height should be 1.38m to 1.8m (4ft 6ins to 6ft)

Stallions may require a double fence line and possibly an electric fence line along the top of the paddock rail. This is to prevent aggression between occupants of different paddocks, as well as to contain the stallion within the allocated area.

Electric fences should be designed, installed and maintained so that contact with them does not cause more than momentary discomfort to the horse; all power units should be correctly earthed. Horses contained by electric fencing need extra supervision until they become accustomed to it. Temporary internal subdivisions created out of electrified tape and plastic posts can provide an effective internal barrier and may facilitate good pasture management, but these should not be used as the sole boundary fence.

## Stable/Accommodation

Welfare should be considered when constructing or altering buildings to provide housing for horses. The main considerations are the safety and comfort of the horses, ease of access and adequate drainage and ventilation. If poorly designed or managed, stabling can contribute to the rapid spread of disease, cause injury and pose significant fire risks. Good vehicular access is essential in case emergency vehicles need to access the site.

# How to provide a suitable environment for your horse

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The building should be constructed soundly, with no exposed surfaces or projections likely to cause injury. All surfaces should be capable of being cleaned and disinfected. If surfaces are treated, non-toxic paints or wood preservatives should be used.

Fixtures and fittings such as tie rings, hay racks and water bowls should be free of sharp edges and positioned so as to avoid injury, particularly to the eyes. If used, hay nets should be fixed at the horse's head height, allowing the horse to eat comfortably yet avoiding the risk of the horse getting its feet or head collar caught in the net, particularly when empty.

Floors should be reasonably even, nonslip and designed to give good drainage, taking stable waste away from the horse. Doors should be a minimum of 1.25m (4ft) wide.

The height of the door and roof should allow the horse or pony to look out with the head comfortably over the door in order to be able to express natural behaviours maintained by visual stimulation. It should be noted that a standard height stable door (1.32m, or 4ft 6in) will be too high for a small pony or standard donkey. The bottom door should be capable of being securely fastened with top and bottom bolts. Stables may also have a top door which should be capable of being secured in the open position. You should be aware that shutting the top door reduces ventilation and natural light and may cause distress to the horse, and as a result this should be avoided in anything other than exceptional circumstances.

Roofs should be high enough to provide adequate ventilation including good air circulation. There should be a minimum clear space to the eaves of 60-90cm (2-3ft) above the ears of the horse in its normal standing position.

Sufficient light is essential within all stabling both for the horse to see adequately, and also to enable inspection and safe handling of horses at all times. This can include portable lighting. Light bulbs should be enclosed in safety fittings with cabling secured well out of reach. Windows and ventilation slats should provide adequate air circulation without creating draughts. Perspex or safety glass (with grilles fitted between the horse and the glass) is advisable. One window or top door should normally be open at all times.

Adequate ventilation in any equine housing is essential. Horses can develop respiratory problems if kept in housing with poor ventilation. Levels of dust within stables should be kept to a minimum and there should be a good flow of air through the buildings without unnecessary draughts.

As horses and ponies vary so greatly in size it is difficult to set an ideal size for loose boxes, barns or stables. However, as a minimum, each horse should have sufficient room to lie down, readily rise and turn around in comfort. Boxes for foaling and for mares with a foal at foot will require additional space. All passageways should be sufficiently wide to enable horses to be led safely past other horses.



# How to provide a suitable environment for your horse

The BHS minimum stable size recommendations are as follows:

- Large horses (17hh+): 3.65m x 4.25m (12ft x 14ft)
- Horses: 3.65m x 3.65m (12ft x 12ft)
- Large ponies (13.2hh+): 3.05m x 3.65m (10ft x 12ft)
- Ponies: 3.05m x 3.05m (10ft x 10ft)
- Foaling box (horse): 4.25m x 4.25m (14ft x 14ft)

The Donkey Sanctuary minimum stable sizes for donkeys are as follows:

- Mules: 3.65m x 3.65m (12ft x 12ft)
- Large donkeys: 3.05m x 3.65m (10ft x 12ft)
- Donkeys: 3.05m x 3.05m (10ft x 10ft)
- Average sized donkeys kept in pairs: 9 square metres (100 sq ft) of covered space.

Larger donkeys and mules will need more space, equivalent to that recommended for similar sized ponies and horses.

Groups of horses can be kept together in communal barns, but care should be taken to ensure that all horses get adequate access to hay, feed and water. Sufficient space should be provided to allow free movement, and to allow all the horses to lie down at the same time. Keeping horses in groups may enhance the psychological wellbeing of the animals, but care should be taken to select groups that are compatible and aggressive horses should be segregated. Late term mares and mares with foals at foot have special requirements and it may not be appropriate to house these animals in communal barns.

Bedding, adequate and suitable bedding material is necessary in all equine accommodation to provide warmth, protection against injury and to enable the horse to lie down in comfort. Bedding material should be nontoxic, free of mould and excessive dust, and either allow effective drainage or be absorbent enough to maintain a dry bed and assist in keeping the air fresh. Where rubber matting is used, a small amount of disposable bedding should be added to absorb urine. Whatever bedding is used (e.g. straw, shavings, rubber stable mats etc.) it should be well managed and changed or cleaned regularly.

Fire is always a risk in stable areas. Advice should be sought from the local Fire Prevention Officer in relation to statutory requirements. Highly flammable liquid material or combustible material should not be stored in or close to stables where horses are housed. Smoking in stable areas should be prohibited. All equipment and services (lighting units, fire extinguishers and alarm systems) should be kept clean, inspected annually by an appropriately qualified person and kept in good working order. All electrical installations at mains voltage must be installed, maintained and periodically inspected and tested by a competent electrician. Wiring and fittings must be inaccessible to horses, well insulated, safeguarded from rodents and properly earthed. If using extension leads or cables care should be taken to reduce the risk injury to the horse. All metal pipe work and structural steelwork must be properly earthed. The risk of fire and electrocution can be reduced by having the whole installation protected by a residual current device (RCD).

Stabled horses should be capable of being released quickly in the event of fire or other emergencies in accordance with a pre-planned emergency turnout procedure.

# How to provide a suitable environment for your horse

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## Tethering

Tethering can be defined as securing an animal by an appropriately attached chain, to a centre point or anchorage, causing it to be confined to a desired area. Tethering is not a suitable method of long-term management of an animal, as it restricts that animal's freedom to exercise itself, to find food and water, or to escape from danger e.g. attacks by dogs, or the extremes of hot and cold weather. It also risks an animal becoming entangled, or injuring itself, on tethering equipment. Tethering may be useful as an exceptional short-term method of animal management (e.g. on brief stops during a journey or in medical cases where short-term restriction of food intake is required under veterinary advice and other methods of restricting grazing are not possible).

When horses are tethered the need for regular supervision is paramount. Tethered horses should be inspected no less frequently than every six hours during normal waking hours and at least twice per day, and water should be made available on a frequent and regular basis throughout the day. More details on the conditions that should be met when horses are tethered are set out in Annex 1. The term 'tethering' as it is used in the Code does not apply to horses that are stall-tied (a common method historically used for stabling cavalry horses). Any horse that is stall-tied should receive regular exercise, unless this method is used under veterinary guidance (e.g. as part of the management of an orthopaedic condition).

## Rugs

Not all horses will need a rug during inclement weather as there are many hardy breeds which grow thick winter coats and are capable of living outdoors throughout the year without rugs. Some of these hardy breeds often thrive better without rugs, as they can lead to the horse becoming too hot. However, where horses are of less hardy breeding, clipped or elderly they may require a rug to help keep them warm and dry during cold, wet weather or provide protection from flies. More than one rug should be available for each horse so that wet rugs can be removed and dried to avoid causing skin irritation. Turnout rugs will need to be removed when the weather (particularly the temperature) improves. Rugs and hoods should be of the correct size to suit the horse, of the correct type for the purpose intended (such as rugs intended for indoor versus outdoor use) and correctly fitted to prevent slipping, rubbing, hair loss, abrasions or restriction of movement. Rugs should be regularly removed so the horse's body condition and general health can be checked. Ideally this should be done daily. Care should be taken to ensure horses do not become too hot as a result of wearing a rug.

Rugs should be cleaned and repaired as necessary and all fastenings kept in good working order. A spare rug should be available to allow a very wet rug to be dried out.

# How to provide a suitable environment for your horse

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## Supervision

Horses at grass should be inspected at least once a day, preferably more often. Stabled or group-housed horses should be inspected at least twice a day. Particular attention should be paid to their gait, demeanour, feet, body condition and appetite so that early signs of disease, injury, illness or parasites can be noticed and appropriate treatment promptly provided. Close examinations should also be conducted at regular intervals, ideally daily, in order to identify any problems (e.g. skin conditions and increase or decrease in body condition score) that may not be apparent from a distance.

Hooves of horses that are primarily field kept should be picked out and at the same time examined for signs of discomfort, wounds, injury, loose shoes, impacted foreign material, early signs of disease or anything else unusual. Stabled horses should have their feet picked out when leaving the stable and horses in work should have their feet picked out before and after exercise.

Horses should be groomed regularly to ensure that the coat is clean, free from wounds or parasites and to detect rug, tack or harness rubbing. The frequency required will depend on your horse's management regime and coat type.

# How to provide a suitable diet for your horse

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Horses are naturally grazers who eat little and often. Their natural diet is mainly grasses, which have a high roughage (fibre) content. Grass mixes designed for production animals such as cows and sheep are not suitable for horses as their higher energy content may lead to obesity and laminitis. Horses should be provided with a predominantly fibre based diet: either grass, hay, haylage or a hay replacement in order to mimic their natural diet and feeding pattern as closely as possible. Overall, horses should be fed an appropriate diet that reflects their needs and consideration should be given to the age, type, weight, condition, health and level of work of the individual.

Horses should have almost constant access to forage (e.g. grass, hay, haylage) during their non-exercise hours. If a horse is stabled for long periods, forage should be provided at regular intervals to try to mimic the natural grazing pattern of horses. If horses are on a weight management diet, there are ways to reduce their calorie intake in a given time while still allowing natural eating patterns (e.g. using haynets with small holes, soaking hay, turnout in an area with restricted grazing or a grazing muzzle). Horses which are fed diets too low in fibre may suffer physical and/or psychological health problems. Donkeys should have constant access to feed quality straw with restricted access to grass, hay or haylage dependent on individual circumstances. Grazing muzzles are not recommended for donkeys.

## How to provide a suitable diet for your horse

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All conserved forage (hay, haylage etc.) should be of good quality. It should be clean (free from soil, debris and poisonous plants), smell fresh and be visibly free from mould and dust. Feeding forage at floor level is good for horses' respiratory health, provided the underlying ground is kept reasonably clean.

The quantity of concentrates fed to a horse as supplementary feed in addition to any forage should be no more than that necessary to provide the required energy for the type and quantity of exercise performed or for any required weight gain. Feeding excessive concentrates can contribute to health problems such as obesity, gastrointestinal upset and laminitis.

If a daily concentrate ration is required it should be spread over at least two meals a day. Horses should not be fed concentrate meals or large portions of forage immediately prior to or following strenuous exercise as this can lead to gastrointestinal upset. However, feeding a small handful of forage prior to exercise may help reduce the risk of stomach ulcers.

Feed should be stored in vermin-proof containers and carefully handled to prevent spoiling and to ensure the quality of feed is maintained. Each feed should be well mixed and freshly prepared. Feed containers and utensils should be kept clean to discourage rodents. Contaminated, mouldy or stale leftover food and forage should not be fed to the horse and should be removed daily.

Where loose horses are fed in groups there should ideally be one feeding site per horse plus an extra one; however, it may be possible to have fewer feeding sites if the group of horses are familiar with each other and there is very little aggression or bullying between horses.

The weight and condition of every horse should be monitored regularly to avoid welfare problems. Feeding should be adjusted to maintain an optimum body condition score (see Body Condition Score Charts). Over-feeding (feeding more energy than is used by the horse) on a long-term basis leads to obesity, which can result in serious welfare problems and can affect health. You should contact your vet or equine nutritionist if you need to discuss the dietary requirements of your horse. A very overweight horse is as much of a welfare concern as is an underweight horse.

In addition to those referred to above, obesity in donkeys can cause hyperlipaemia, a significant metabolic disorder which can be fatal, so extra care should be taken to ensure that donkeys do not become overweight. A sudden change in appetite or change in weight can be a sign of ill-health and you should pay close attention to whether your horse is showing any other signs of illness. Your vet should be consulted if you have any concerns.

A horse's nutritional requirements will vary through its life and foals, pregnant mares and elderly horses in particular have special dietary requirements. You should consult your vet or equine nutritionist to discuss your horse's diet if you have any concerns.

Any diet changes (increase in volume, change in feed or hay etc.) should be made gradually. Sudden changes can lead to gastrointestinal upsets including colic and diarrhoea and should be avoided. Inexperienced owners or owners/keepers with any concerns about how best to feed their horse should seek expert opinion from a vet or equine nutritionist.

# How to provide a suitable diet for your horse

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## Laminitis

Laminitis is a debilitating disease which can affect any horse and any or all of the horse's feet. The causes of laminitis are complex but there are a number of measures that can be used to help prevent your horse developing it. Obesity and over-eating remain major factors in laminitis. Horses that are overweight are at a high risk of developing laminitis. Laminitis may also be associated with eating excess amounts of lush grass or concentrate feed so grazing may need to be restricted and care should be taken to prevent overfeeding. Horses that are prone to excessive weight gain may need their grazing restricted at certain times of the year. As discussed above, being overweight for a long period may result in horses developing hormonal disease (such as Equine Metabolic Syndrome), which can also predispose horses to laminitis. Discuss this issue with your vet if you have any concerns.

Laminitis can also be seen in horses that are not overweight (e.g. associated with hormonal or metabolic disorders, concussive forces, stress or other illness). If you have any concerns you should contact your vet.

## Water

It is essential that all horses have continuous access to a clean supply of fresh water. When this is impractical adequate clean water should be made available to them on a frequent and regular basis to ensure that their welfare needs are properly met. Natural water sources such as streams are not always satisfactory, as they may be contaminated, so an alternative supply may be required. Natural water sources should be clean, plentiful, have easy access and should not have a sandy base which may cause health problems if disturbed when the horses drink. Extra care should be taken during hot or icy weather to ensure the water supply is maintained and sufficient, for example, by regularly breaking the ice during cold spells or providing an additional water source during hot weather.

Water troughs or buckets should be securely fixed at a convenient height to allow, if necessary, horses of different sizes to drink comfortably and it should not be possible for horses to paw the water or dislodge the trough and knock it over. Water troughs should be constructed and positioned in such a way that minimises risk of injury. Water troughs and buckets should be checked regularly to ensure that water is available at all times. Stabled horses should have continuous access to fresh water. Water providers must be constructed and positioned in such a way that minimises risk of injury. Automatic waterers should be checked regularly to ensure they are working properly.

Water troughs and containers should be cleaned regularly to prevent the build-up of algae and other debris. Use a cleaning substance which is not toxic to horses. If horses are tethered water buckets should be refilled at regular intervals so that they have continuous access to clean water. Water containers should be spill proof and easily cleanable and positioned where they can be easily reached by the horse but cannot become tangled in the tether.

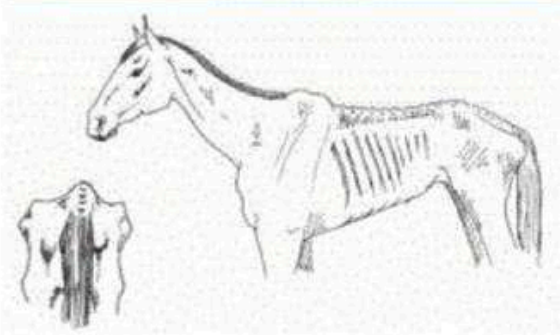
Horses require a relatively large amount of water on a daily basis due to their large body size. The amount of water required will vary depending on the individual horse but can range from 25- 50 litres per day for an average size adult horse (around 5 to 10 litres per 100 kg bodyweight per day). The volume required will increase in hot weather and additional water may need to be provided after exercise. Horses will have increased water requirements in certain other situations (e.g. lactating mares).

# How to provide a suitable diet for your horse

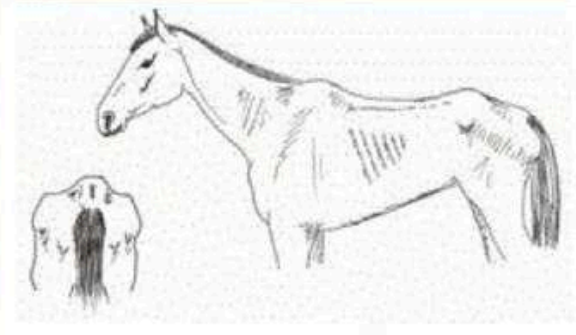
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## Body Condition Scoring - Horses

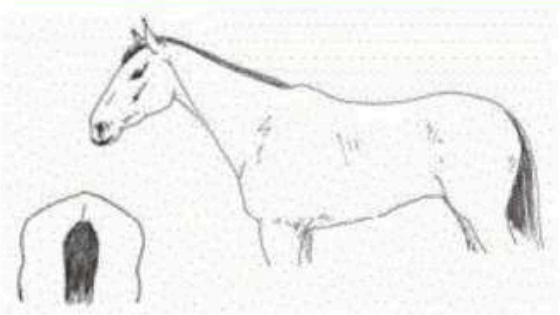
### 0. Emaciated



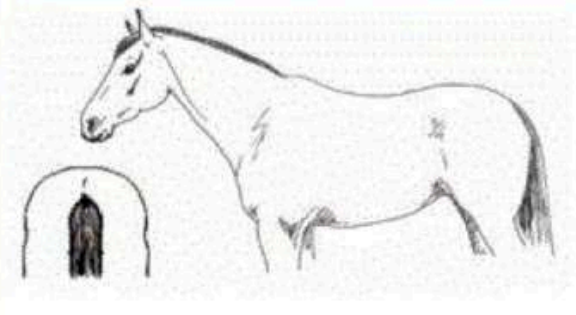
### 1. Poor



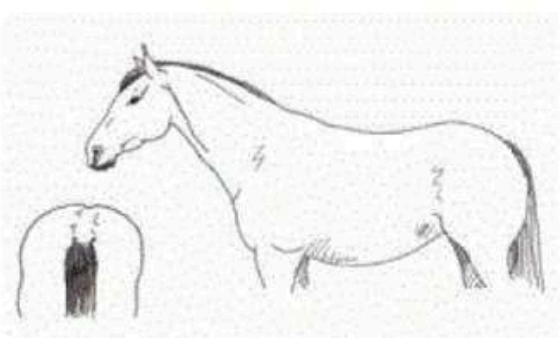
### 2. Moderate



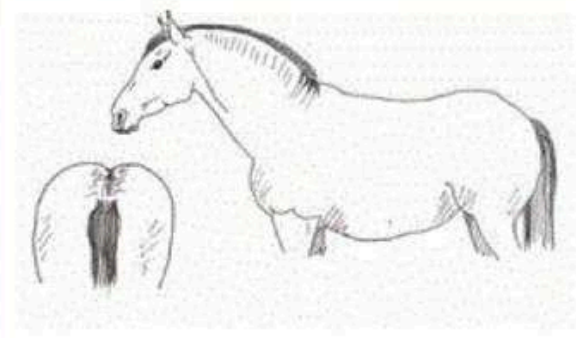
### 3. Good



### 4. Fat



### 5. Obese



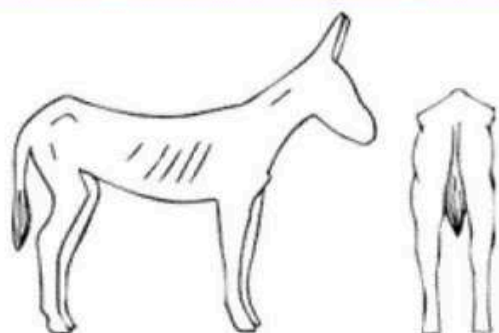


# How to provide a suitable diet for your horse

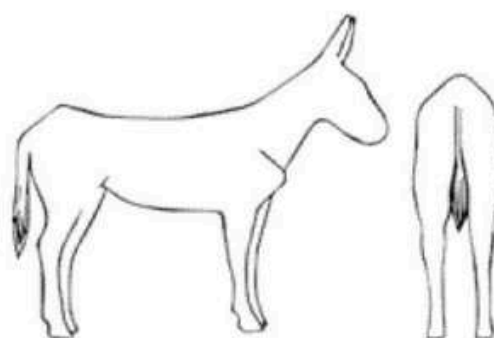
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## Body Condition Scoring - Donkeys

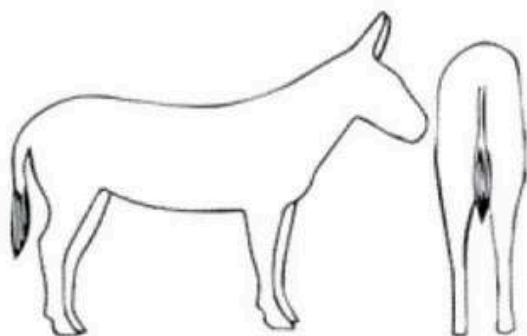
**1. Poor**



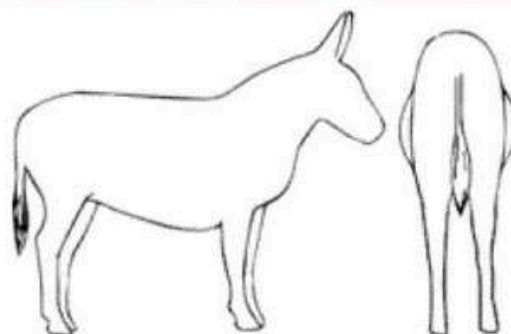
**2. Moderate**



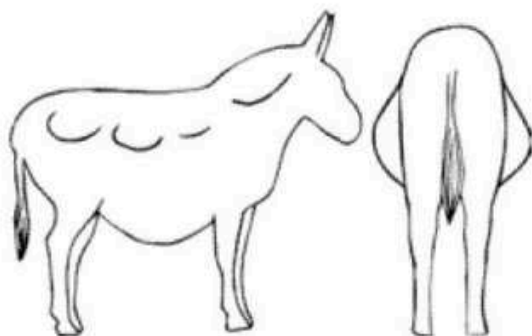
**3. Ideal**



**4. Fat**



**5. Obese**



# How to provide for the behavioural needs of your horse

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This section offers guidance on your horse's behaviour. The horse evolved as a herd animal and in a natural state they would spend 16-20 hours a day grazing and browsing for forage. As a result, they have a strong behavioural need to chew and this needs to be met in modern management through appropriate provision of forage and grazing.

## Exercise

In the wild, horses would travel long distances whilst searching for resources. Horses require adequate exercise, or freedom to exercise and this will require time and effort from the horse owner or keeper. All stabled horses, apart from those on box rest for veterinary reasons, will benefit from daily turnout in the field to allow them to graze and socialise with other horses. This may have the added benefit of reducing the risk of developing abnormal behaviours such as windsucking, weaving, crib-biting, box walking and wood chewing. If turnout is not feasible, stabled horses should receive appropriate exercise daily, unless contrary to veterinary advice. Tethered horses also require daily exercise.

## Training

Any behavioural intervention can have both intended and unintended consequences for horses and should not be brought about without careful consideration and advice from an experienced horse professional. Horse training should be humane, effective and safe for both horse and handler. Horses do not perform unwanted behaviours intentionally to defy their handlers; usually there is an underlying reason such as pain, discomfort, fear or habit (the behaviour has been learnt because it has been rewarded, often accidentally, in some way). A reward can be the release of pressure on a head collar, or increasing distance between a horse and something it finds fearful. It is important to understand the behavioural needs of horses so that you can try and identify the cause of the behaviour, rather than label the horse as "naughty". Any training should be appropriate to the age, experience and condition of the animal in question. If you are unsure how to best handle your horse, advice should be sought from an experienced horse professional.

It is an offence to cause an animal unnecessary suffering and this includes psychological suffering. Intervention or punishment intended to suppress an unwanted behaviour should only be delivered immediately so it is directly linked to the behaviour in question. Punishment can cause psychological distress to the horse and may induce fear, which you may then become associated with. Using a whip inappropriately to suppress unwanted behaviour may also cause pain, affect learning and/or stop the horse trialling new responses. You should not beat your horse or use other inappropriate punishments.

Any restraint method used to assist normal management or treatment of the horse should be applied by a competent person only, and for the minimum period necessary. If a horse's behaviour warrants the use of a restraint method such as a twitch, consideration should be given to retraining the horse so that it no longer requires the restraint method. The horse's psychological state and the potential to develop a long-lasting fear response whilst restrained must be taken into account. Sedatives must be prescribed by a vet and only used under their guidance.



# How to provide the right companionship for your horse

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This section offers guidance on providing your horse with suitable company.

Horses are herd animals and in the wild would live in relatively stable social groups. They should be able to socialise with members of their own species. Isolating a horse from other horses can have a negative psychological impact. Where this is not possible, other animals may be used to provide company; however the company of other horses is by far the better option. Horses may become distressed if separated from other horses, or from a horse with which they have formed a pair bond. Donkeys have particular socialisation needs and can become ill – potentially fatally so - if suddenly separated from a companion that they have bonded with. Arrangements and associated additional costs need to be considered when moving bonded pairs (e.g. veterinary hospitalisation).

Horses should always be treated as individuals, even when kept in large groups. When forming new groups care should be taken to minimise fighting and stress, particularly when horses are to be mixed together for the first time. This risk can be reduced by increasing the space allowance or by grazing the new animal in an area immediately adjacent to the existing group for a short period prior to their introduction and/or removing back shoes of all animals during the introduction period. The group should be closely monitored after a new animal has been introduced.

Horses may demonstrate aggressive behaviours towards one another when competing for resources such as feed, water and social contact, so it is important to ensure all horses are getting the feed and water they require. Care should be taken to ensure fields are not overstocked. Measures should be taken to identify individuals that are not coping well and to provide for those with higher maintenance needs. Aggressive individuals may not be suitable for mixing in fields or communal barns. Incompatible individuals should be separated. These may include uncastrated males (colts, stallions) and "rigs" (a stallion with undescended testicles or a horse which has been incompletely castrated).

Mares heavily in foal or with young foal at foot may need to be separated from other horses. Care should be taken to ensure the needs of these animals are adequately met. Although keeping mares with foals in social groups can be very beneficial, some mares can become very protective of their foals (sometimes referred to being 'foal-proud') and in these circumstances may pose a risk to other horses and people – care should be taken to ensure that such mares are kept separate from other horses if necessary and from members of the public, and appropriate precautions should be taken when handling them.

The more horses kept, the more time, effort and resources are required to safeguard their welfare. Stallions have special requirements and may not be suitable for turnout with other horses. It is important that stallions receive adequate exercise and environmental stimulation. Stallions and colts can live with mixed herds but this may lead to unwanted breeding and is not recommended. It may be possible for stallions' social needs to be met by living out in all male groups (e.g. mix of stallions, colts and geldings).

# How to keep your horse healthy and protect them from pain, suffering, injury and disease

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This section offers guidance on the health and welfare of your horse. Become familiar with what is normal for your horse such as normal temperature, breathing rate, water consumption and mobility. Any deviation from what is normal for your horse is a reason to be vigilant.

## Illness

Everyone responsible for the supervision of horses should be able to recognise signs of ill health and have a basic knowledge of equine first aid. It is also vital that owners and keepers have access to a vet to diagnose or treat any illness, injury or disease. Owners and keepers should make plans in case of emergency and leave records of their wishes if passing the care of their horses to another person for a period of time, such as during a holiday, or in the event of their death.

Owners and keepers of horses should be able to recognise the normal behaviour of their horses and recognise the signs that may indicate poor health. These include:

- change in appetite or drinking habits (in donkeys, loss of appetite can be life threatening in a very short period of time so veterinary advice should be sought immediately);
- change in droppings or urine;
- change in demeanour or behaviour;
- change in weight;
- any signs of pain or discomfort, including facial tension, reluctance to move, pawing at the ground, rolling, increased rate of respiration and sweating;
- reluctance or inability to stand;
- any sign of injury or lameness, including puncture wounds; and
- any signs of disease, such as discharge from the eye, ear or nose or coughing or breathing difficulties.

This list is not exhaustive and any change in your horse's behaviour should alert you to the possibility that it might be ill. If you think that there is anything wrong with your horse, contact your veterinary practice.

When a horse becomes unwell, the cause of this deterioration should be identified and immediate remedial action taken. Veterinary advice should be obtained if the horse appears to be ill or in pain and the cause is not clear or if initial first aid treatment is not effective. In the case of foot problems, advice should be obtained from a registered farrier or vet. Advice from the vet or farrier should be followed diligently.

# How to keep your horse healthy and protect them from pain, suffering, injury and disease

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## Routine Health Care

A parasite control programme should be put in place following consultation with a vet or other Suitably Qualified Person one registered with the Animal Medicines Training Regulatory Authority (AMTRA); this should include appropriate faecal worm egg counts and the use of wormers when necessary. The routine use of wormers without faecal egg counts is strongly discouraged, as this will encourage parasite resistance to these drugs, leading to wormers becoming ineffective. Careful pasture management including the rotation of grazing and dung collection is an important part of an effective parasite control programme.

There should be adequate control of infectious and contagious disease by a programme agreed with a vet, which will include appropriate hygiene and isolation procedures and vaccination. When a new horse enters premises, the horse should be isolated before being introduced to the rest of the herd. As a minimum, this should mean that the new horse is not turned out with other horses, and is stabled in a separate part of the yard. The horse should not be allowed direct contact with other horses during this period, and separate equipment should be used in the grooming and care of the new horse. This period of isolation will allow the horse to develop any clinical signs of disease that may be incubating at the time of arrival, allowing veterinary advice to be sought before other horses on the yard become infected. The period of isolation and any testing for infectious diseases should be determined in consultation with your vet. It may also be appropriate to conduct a faecal worm egg count before the animal is turned out, with wormers given if necessary.

If a horse on any premises is ill with an infectious or contagious disease, your vet should be consulted as to what measures are needed to try to prevent the spread of the disease to other animals. In general, measures to be taken include preventing sharing of equipment between different horses, washing hands and possibly changing clothes between suspect animals and healthy animals, isolating affected animals and having disinfectant footbaths between stables.

It is strongly recommended that all horses are vaccinated against tetanus as horses are very susceptible to this fatal condition. Horses can also be vaccinated against infectious diseases such as equine herpes virus (respiratory and abortion form only), strangles, and equine influenza (often available as a combined vaccine with tetanus). You should discuss with your vet what vaccinations are most appropriate for your horse as this will depend on its age and use. In-foal mares are at risk from infection with equine herpes virus which can cause abortion. Equine herpes virus is common in young horses thus pregnant mares should be separated from young horses.

Teeth should be inspected by a vet or British Association of Equine Dental Technicians (BAEDT) equine dental technician at least once a year, and rasped or otherwise treated if necessary. Any treatment which is classified as an act of veterinary surgery must be carried out by a vet. Horses with worn or abnormal teeth are unable to chew their food properly which leads to poor digestion and they may experience dental pain. Owners and keepers should look out for signs of this problem, such as: half chewed food dropping out of the mouth; poor body condition and lack of energy; and abnormal mouth movements when ridden. Older horses may have special dental requirements and may need to have their teeth checked more than once a year.

# How to keep your horse healthy and protect them from pain, suffering, injury and disease

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Every horse owner and keeper should have some understanding of the care of a horse's feet and the need to treat lameness promptly and effectively. Feet should be trimmed regularly by a competent person and attention should be paid to their growth and balance. A horse should not be expected to work at a level above that which the hooves are capable of, whether shod or unshod. If horses are used unshod they will need to be carefully managed, and receive regular hoof care which ensures that any use on difficult surfaces does not cause them to become sore and lame. In the main, horses ridden or driven on roads or hard, rough surfaces will need to be regularly shod by a registered farrier. Loose shoes should receive prompt attention from a farrier to prevent possible injury. Hooves should be trimmed and/or re-shod as advised by the farrier, which should usually be every 4-8 weeks. The frequency of hoof trimming will depend on various factors including health, nutrition, age and type of work.

Flies can cause a great deal of irritation to horses, particularly during the summer, and can introduce infection to wounds so if wounds occur, an appropriate treatment from a vet should be used. Midges can also be a source of irritation during the spring and summer and can cause sweet itch (an allergic skin condition). Consideration should be given to preventative fly and midge control through the use of fly repellents, fly rugs or masks and, for horses particularly sensitive to fly or midge bites, stabling at dawn and dusk when flies and particularly midges are most active. If used, fly rugs or masks should be properly fitted to avoid rubbing and slipping.

It is recommended that working horses have at least an annual veterinary inspection to certify that they are fit for purpose. Special regard should be given to work-related health issues.

## Breeding

If you decide to breed from your horse, there are a number of considerations to be taken into account. You should always consider whether your horse is a suitable candidate for breeding, whether the stallion you intend to use has been inspected and is free from heritable conditions and whether you could buy or rehome a youngster rather than breeding a foal. In addition, mares have special requirements during pregnancy, foaling and the post-foaling period and you should make sure you are aware of these before breeding from your mare. The care of a young foal can be expensive and requires a large investment of time, and there is no guarantee that the foal will mature into the animal that you want. You should consider whether you are prepared for this before breeding from your mare.

# How to keep your horse healthy and protect them from pain, suffering, injury and disease

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## Saddlery and Harnesses

Saddlery and harness should be correctly fitted, preferably by a qualified saddle fitter or harness fitter. Regular checks should be carried out to ensure that the fit of saddlery and harness has not changed through routine use or change in body condition. Equipment should be regularly cleaned and maintained in good order to ensure comfort, safety and effectiveness. All saddlery, including bits, bridles, nosebands, harnesses and training aids, including boots and bandages if used, should be suitable for the purpose, correctly fitted to avoid discomfort or injury and only left on for the minimum time necessary. They should only be used and fitted by a competent person who is knowledgeable and experienced in their use.

You should avoid turning your horse out wearing a head collar unless this is essential. If your horse does need to wear a head collar, ensure it is correctly fitted, of a material that can break easily should the horse become caught, and is checked and removed daily to check for skin irritation. You should also consider what training the horse requires to reach the stage where it no longer needs to wear a head collar whilst turned out.

## Care of Older or Ill Horses

As horses become older their needs may become greater and they may well require increased supervision and additional veterinary care. They may develop age-related conditions, such as dental problems, and their immune systems may become less efficient. When a horse reaches the end of its active working life, or is very elderly, consideration should be given to whether the horse can be provided with a good quality of life in retirement. Owners have a responsibility to ensure that they or whoever is entrusted with the care of such a horse is fully aware of the needs of that horse.

You should have a plan in place in the event that your horse needs to be euthanased, either as a quality of life decision or in the event of serious injury or illness. Although this may be difficult to think about, it is important to consider the financial and practical aspects of euthanasia should the worst happen. Research suggests that only 9% of horse's die of natural causes, so planning for the timely euthanasia of your horse is a key responsibility of ownership. Where, in the opinion of a vet, a horse is significantly suffering, has not responded to treatment for a serious injury or condition involving significant pain, has a disease or injury from which there is no prospect of recovery and for which no treatment is available, or where a horse is in such a condition that it would be inhumane to keep it alive, the animal should be humanely destroyed without delay by a vet or a suitably qualified, experienced and equipped person, such as a licensed slaughterman. Euthanasia should also be considered when a horse's quality of life has deteriorated significantly due to chronic or age-related conditions. Guidelines on end of life decision making are published by a number of equine welfare charities.

The horse's welfare must always come first. Therefore, in the interests of the horse and to prevent the horse suffering unnecessary pain and distress, owners should give the issue their full consideration by developing a plan for end of life well before the time comes to make a decision. This should include considering the locally available methods of euthanasia, which is likely to be most appropriate for that individual horse and the costs involved. Owners should be aware that the full costs of euthanasia and carcase disposal are rarely covered by veterinary insurance policies.

## This Code of Practice applies to all horses

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The purposes of the Code is to provide practical guidance to help you to comply with the provisions set out under section 6 of the Animal Welfare Act. It does not tell you precisely how to care for your horse but it does summarise important things you should know and what to do when making decisions about how best to care for your horse.

Breach of a provision of this Code is not an offence itself but if proceedings are brought against you for an offence under section 6 of the Act, the Court will look at whether or not you have complied with the Code in deciding whether you have committed an offence.

If you are unsure about anything to do with the care and welfare of your horse, you should always seek advice from an expert such as a veterinary surgeon, mainly referred to as vet.

## Sources of further information

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### Websites of relevant organisations

The British Association of Equine Dental Technicians [www.baedt.com](http://www.baedt.com)

The Blue Cross [www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk)

The British Equine Veterinary Association [www.beva.org.uk](http://www.beva.org.uk)

The British Equine Trade Association [www.beta-uk.org](http://www.beta-uk.org)

The British Horse Society [www.bhs.org.uk](http://www.bhs.org.uk)

The British Horseracing authority [www.britishhorseracing.com](http://www.britishhorseracing.com)

The British Veterinary Association [www.bva.co.uk](http://www.bva.co.uk)

The Donkey Sanctuary [www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk](http://www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk)

The Moredun Foundation Equine Grass Sickness Fund [www.grasssickness.org.uk](http://www.grasssickness.org.uk)

The Farriers Registration Council: [www.farrier-reg.gov.uk](http://www.farrier-reg.gov.uk)

The Humane Slaughter Association: [www.hsa.org.uk](http://www.hsa.org.uk)

The Horse Trust: [www.horsetrust.org.uk](http://www.horsetrust.org.uk)

The National Equine Welfare Council [www.newc.co.uk](http://www.newc.co.uk)

The Pony Club [www.pcuk.org](http://www.pcuk.org)

The Redwings Horse Sanctuary [www.redwings.org.uk](http://www.redwings.org.uk)

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals [www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk)

The world horse welfare [www.worldhorsewelfare.org](http://www.worldhorsewelfare.org)

The Manx Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals [www.manxspca.com](http://www.manxspca.com)

Douglas Bay Tramway Heritage Trust [www.horsetram.im](http://www.horsetram.im)

The Isle of Man Home of Rest for Old Horses [www.iomhorseshome.im](http://www.iomhorseshome.im)





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**Government**

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