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Hello horsey owners,

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A question I get asked a lot... is my horse too thin? Why can't I get weight on my horse? Let's look at some reasons why horses can become underweight.

FOOD: The most obvious thing is food! Are we feeding the right quantity for the horse's needs? Are we feeding the right quality of food? At the moment, the grass on the fields are not very high in nutritional value, so many horses will need some kind of supplementary feeding in the form of better quality hay bales or some concentrates.

INTERNAL PARASITES: When last was the horse dewormed? And did the deworming actually work? Just because the horse was dewormed recently does not mean that the deworming used actually worked! We can do a faecal egg count for you to determine if the dewormer worked.

TEETH: Horses should have their teeth checked by a vet or equine dentist at least once a year from the age of about 3 years old. Sharp edges on the teeth can cause considerable pain when eating and can lead to weight loss. When food falls out of the horse's mouth while it is eating (quidding), it is often a sign of poor teeth

BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS like crib biting, wind sucking and wood chewing will result in weight loss. These behavioural problems often start out due to boredom, pain or a lack of interaction with other horses. These behaviours also cause massive damage to teeth and should be addressed as quickly as possible. Leaving it just reinforces the habit and makes it very hard to stop.

DISEASE some illnesses can cause a horse to lose weight. Having a blood panel done on a horse that has problems with its weight when all the other usual causes have been ruled out is a good idea, and it can be done right here in our lab at the practise. The blood tests check kidney function, liver function etc to point us in the direction of the problem.

STOMACH ULCERS can cause weight loss. Horses experience abdominal pain when eating and will thus eat less, leading to weight loss.

SOME TOXINS from eating poisonous plants or mouldy food can cause organ damage also leading to weight loss.

HIERARCHY: Some horses get bullied in the pack if they are all fed together and cannot get access to food like concentrates and good hay. Higher ranked horses will push them away. Allowing each horse to be fed on his own to get the right amount of food or spreading food out instead of just dumping it in one spot will help the lower ranked horses get their fill too.

So-called **HARD KEEPERS** are often not as hard to get weight on once you know what the actual problem is.

If you are worried about your horse's weight, come have a chat to us and let's try to sort the problem out. We all love happy healthy looking horses.

PS. Please remember that a sudden introduction of large amounts of energy rich foods (concentrates) or a sudden increase in the quantity of concentrates can lead to very serious illness. Do not just start feeding concentrates to horses that aren't used to it or do not just rapidly increase food quantities or suddenly introduce a new kind of food. Come have a chat to us on how to do a gradual safe introduction of energy dense food or food conversion in order to avoid serious illness.

Have a lovely weekend with your horses and loved ones.

Dr Marleece

Parys Animal Hospital