

January Obesity Awareness Month

Dear ESS clients,

In light of New Year's resolutions, dieting after the holidays, and new fitness routines, ESS has dedicated the month of January to "Obesity Awareness Month."

The reasons horses develop obesity are similarly correlated to the reasons humans develop obesity. They eat too well and don't work out enough! And just like us, it gets worse during the winter holiday season! Therefore, this is an especially important time of year to address the problem of obesity in horses.

Obesity is typically under recognized by horse owners and has become the new "normal." Fat horses have historically been rewarded in the show ring... an arched neck and a round topline is a very pretty picture. It will take time to change the appearance of fat show horses, but with all the new educational materials and research studies available for review, we can't ignore the fact that we should strive to mold a much leaner and healthier equine partner.

Indeed, horses have evolved over time. Horses used to roam long distances to find sufficient quantities of forage. A horse had to optimize its metabolism to maintain weight under uncertain conditions, commonly feeding on plant species of low sugar and starch content. In the wild horse, the fall brought with it decreasing availability in grass forage and as a survival mechanism, the horse modified the way it ate and deposited fat within its body. Additionally, the endocrine system changed in order to maintain body condition. The intermediate lobe of the equine pituitary gland is extremely well-developed and is specifically important in herbivores because its secretions during the fall help the horse get ready for the winter. Some horses are better at this than others. Pony breeds represent this phenomenon very well. It is a rare occurrence to see an underweight pony!

If you look at the care of today's horses, they are commonly stalled and fed energy rich, nutritionally improved diets twice per day. Furthermore, their exercise is restricted to roaming around a small paddock or pasture. They may get exercised a few times per week. And if their owners are anything like me, it is hard to stay consistent in their exercise routine during the chilly months!

There are several health consequences of obesity in horses. Not only can increased weight cause exercise intolerance, exacerbate arthritic conditions, and lead to tendon and ligament injuries during athletic activity, but it may cause thermoregulatory inefficiency, poor

reproductive performance, and the development of fatty tumors. These tumors can strangulate intestines within the abdomen and significantly increase your horse's risk of colic.

Obesity also contributes to worsening of insulin resistance in horses. Fat and muscle cells depend on insulin to take up glucose. When the tissues are not sensitive to the effects of insulin, it takes a larger amount of insulin to do the job. Equine Metabolic Syndrome is a relatively new term used to describe a subset of high risk horses that are obese, have insulin resistance, and are at increased risk of laminitis ("Founder"), but do not necessarily have a dysfunction of the pituitary. The use of the term implies that the sole underlying cause is insulin resistance, which helps to differentiate affected horses from those affected with either hypothyroidism (very rare) or PPID. Alternatively, a condition called Pars Pituitary Intermedia Dysfunction (PPID), also known as Cushing's disease, is an age-related dysfunction occurring within the intermediate lobe of the pituitary, leaving it in a hyperfunctional state, much like a tumor. Laminitis is also a devastating complication with this disease process. Laminitis is the rapid degradation of the anatomical connection between the hoof wall and the coffin bone within the foot, a very painful inflammatory state that often warrants euthanasia. As the old saying goes "no foot, no horse."

In recognition of "January Obesity Month," Equine Sport Solutions (ESS) is offering a promotional incentive to increase awareness of these implications. The following is being offered at a significantly discounted price in package form.

1. Health and body conditioning evaluation
2. Fitness and soundness check
3. Nutrition and diet consultation
4. Laminitis screen of both front feet (2 digital radiographic films of each foot)
5. EMS/PPID Monitoring Panel through Antech Laboratories
6. Custom designed weight loss or conditioning program based on your horse's examination results.

If it is determined that your horse needs to shed a few pounds, register via email to receive a free saddle pad or halter inscribed "ESS Weight Loss Participant." Be sure to view pictures on our site!

Sincerely,

Brittany Factor, DVM