



# EQUINE NEWSLETTER



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# Summer Weight Loss in Horses

## Hidden Causes You Shouldn't Ignore

*With longer grazing hours and improved pasture availability, many owners expect horses to hold or even gain weight during the summer months. So, when weight loss occurs, it can be both unexpected and concerning.*

Summer weight loss is not a diagnosis in itself, but a clinical sign that something may be affecting appetite, digestion or overall health. Identifying the cause early is essential to preventing longer term issues.

A key part of this process is regular weight monitoring, which allows subtle changes to be picked up before they become visually obvious.

### **The importance of weight monitoring**

Relying on visual assessment alone can be misleading, particularly in summer when coat changes, workload and posture can disguise gradual condition loss.

Consistent weight monitoring, using a weighbridge where possible, or a weigh tape used in a standardised way, provides objective data over time. This makes it much easier to detect weight loss and possible issues earlier.

### **Regular monitoring helps owners:**

- Identify early, gradual changes in body weight.
- Track response to dietary or management adjustments.
- Detect issues that may not yet be visible to the eye.
- Provide valuable information for veterinary investigations.

Small, consistent losses over a few weeks can be clinically significant, even if the horse still appears outwardly well.

### **1. Dental disease: a common hidden cause**

Dental discomfort is one of the most frequent causes of weight loss seen in practice.

### **Even with abundant summer grazing, horses with dental issues may struggle to chew efficiently, leading to:**

- Poor breakdown of forage
- Reduced nutrient absorption
- Quidding (dropping partially chewed food)
- Gradual, often unnoticed weight loss

Conditions such as sharp enamel points, loose, fractured or diseased teeth often require a thorough oral examination to identify. Regular dental checks are essential to maintain effective feed utilisation.





## 2. Parasites: a summer risk

Parasites are often overlooked in summer. Small redworms, tapeworms and increased pasture contamination can all contribute to weight loss and poor nutrient uptake, especially in young or older horses. Faecal egg counts and targeted worming remain the best approach to control.

## 3. Chronic disease: an early warning sign

If dental or parasite issues are ruled out, underlying disease should be considered. Conditions such as PPID, gastric ulcers, liver or kidney disease and chronic gut disease can all cause gradual weight loss. Regular weight monitoring helps identify subtle changes early.

## 4. Summer management factors

Weight loss is not always disease related. Poor pasture quality, increased workload or limited forage access within herd groups can also contribute or worsen existing issues.

### When should you be concerned?

Seek veterinary advice if you notice:

- Weight loss over two to three weeks
- A downward weight trend
- Reduced appetite
- Changes in droppings
- Reduced performance or energy

### Supporting healthy summer weight

Good management includes:

- Regular weight checks
- Routine dental care
- Targeted parasite control
- High-quality forage
- Veterinary investigation if weight loss continues



**Summer weight loss should never be ignored. While management changes may play a role, it can also signal dental disease, parasites or chronic illness. Regular weight tracking is one of the best ways to detect problems early.**



# The “Should I Call the Vet?”

## Guide Every Horse Owner Needs

*As an equine veterinary team, one of the most common questions we hear is: “Do I need to call the vet, or can I wait and see?” It’s a fair question. Horses are masters at masking illness and many issues can start subtly before becoming serious.*

**This guide is designed to help you make confident, timely decisions about when to pick up the phone.**

### 1. Always trust your instincts

You know your horse better than anyone. If something feels “off”, even if you can’t pinpoint why, it’s worth taking seriously. Horses rarely change behaviour without a reason.

Subtle signs like reduced enthusiasm, quietness in the stable or changes in routine behaviour can be early indicators of a problem.

### 2. Colic: never wait and see

Colic is one of the most urgent equine emergencies.

Call your vet immediately if you notice:

- Pawing, rolling or repeated lying down and getting up
- Looking at or biting at the flank
- Reduced or absent droppings
- Sweating, restlessness or unusual quietness

Even mild colic signs should be assessed quickly. Early treatment dramatically improves outcomes.

### 3. Lameness or sudden movement changes

If your horse is:

- Suddenly lame (even mildly)
- Reluctant to move forward
- Short-striding or uneven

...it’s time to call the vet.

Waiting can turn a minor issue (like a hoof abscess or soft tissue strain) into something more serious.

A vet assessment helps identify whether rest, treatment or further investigation is needed.



### 4. Wounds: size isn’t everything

**Call the vet immediately if:**

- A wound is deep, gaping or bleeding heavily
- It’s near a joint, tendon or eye
- There is swelling, heat or lameness associated
- You’re unsure how old or contaminated it is

Horses can develop infections surprisingly quickly, especially in their lower limbs. Even a minor wound can lead to serious complications if left untreated, particularly if it is near a joint or tendon sheath.



## 5. Temperature, breathing and general illness

A horse's normal temperature is typically around: **37.5–38.5°C/99.5–101.3°F**

### Contact your vet if you see:

- Fever (over 38.5°C/101.3°F).
- Persistent coughing or nasal discharge.
- Laboured or increased breathing at rest.
- Marked lethargy or loss of appetite.

Respiratory infections, including conditions like equine influenza or equine asthma, can escalate if not managed early.

## 6. Sudden changes in appetite or droppings

Digestive changes often give early warning of trouble.

Call your vet if:

- Your horse stops eating or shows reduced appetite.
- There are no droppings for several hours.
- Droppings become very loose or very dry suddenly.
- There is obvious straining or discomfort when passing manure.

## 7. Eye problems

Any abnormality in a horse's eye should be treated as an emergency and seen by a vet the same day. Eye problems can worsen quickly, causing pain and risking permanent damage or loss of vision. Signs such as squinting, discharge, cloudiness, swelling, or rubbing the eye mean urgent veterinary attention is needed.



## 8. Swelling, heat or unexplained lumps

Not all swellings are emergencies, but you should seek advice if:

- Swelling appears suddenly.
- It is hot, painful or growing quickly.
- Your horse is lame or uncomfortable.
- It is located on a limb or near a joint.

Early assessment can prevent complications like infection or tendon damage.

## 9. Behavioural changes

Sometimes the earliest sign of illness is behavioural:

- Unusual irritability or dullness.
- Resistance to grooming or handling.
- Changes in performance under saddle.
- Increased anxiety or restlessness.

If behaviour changes persist, it's worth investigating with your vet.

## 10. When it's better to call than wait

Call your vet if:

- You are unsure. Uncertainty is a valid reason.
- Symptoms are worsening.
- Multiple mild signs appear together.
- Your horse is "just not right."

Delaying advice often makes treatment more complicated than it needs to be.

Calling a vet early is not an overreaction: it's responsible horse ownership.

Many serious conditions begin with subtle signs and early intervention often leads to faster recovery and better outcomes.

If in doubt, pick up the phone. We would always rather reassure you early than treat a preventable emergency later.





# Managing Horses in Peak Competition Season

*Advice on recovery, nutrition and preventing overuse injuries.*

Peak competition season places significant demands on the equine athlete. From a veterinary perspective, the horses that stay sound and perform consistently are those with well-managed recovery, appropriate nutrition and early attention to subtle changes in their body and behaviour.

## Recovery:

Fitness is built through work, but it is consolidated during recovery. Without enough recovery time, fatigue accumulates and injury risk increases.

### How to help with recovery:

- Plan regular lighter days or rest periods each week.
- Include an effective cool-down (walking and gradual heart-rate recovery).
- Use turnout to support natural movement and muscle relaxation.
- Monitor for early signs of fatigue such as stiffness, reduced willingness or slower recovery after exercise.

Prolonged recovery times are often the earliest indicator that a horse is being overworked.

**Nutrition:** supporting performance and repair. A horse in peak work requires a diet that supports energy and hydration.

### How to support with nutrition:

Base the diet on high quality forage.

- Adjust hard feed according to workload rather than routine.
- Provide daily salt and use electrolytes during intense training, travel, or hot weather.

Good nutrition helps reduce muscle fatigue and supports recovery between competitions.

### Avoiding overuse injuries

Most competition injuries develop gradually due to repeated strain rather than a single incident.

### How to avoid overuse injuries:

- Vary training to avoid repetitive loading of the same structures.
- Avoid consecutive days of intense work.
- Be mindful of ground conditions, especially hard or deep surfaces.
- Monitor closely for heat, swelling, subtle lameness or changes in performance.
- Seek veterinary advice early if you notice any change. Small issues are much easier to manage before they progress.

Overuse injuries are one of the most common reasons horses are pulled from competition mid-season, but they are also among the most preventable.

Noticing small changes early and involving your vet can help keep your horse performing at its best.