

## Weight Loss In Horses

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As we enter winter we begin the season in which horses naturally start to lose a little weight. This can be good news for the overweight pony with the propensity to founder. However, for older horses and those individuals who struggle to keep weight on throughout the year, winter weight loss can be a life threatening problem. If your horse appears to be losing weight or has struggled with weight loss before, now is a good time to start monitoring your horse. It may be a good idea to have a preventative exam of your horse performed by your vet. Addressing an underlying problem at the beginning of the winter season will make recovering much easier than waiting until spring when the horse has lost a couple hundred pounds.

### Causes of Weight Loss

There are many things that cause a horse to lose weight, but the most common are related to diet, internal parasites, dental problems, competition between horses for feed, and chronic disease. Age can affect weight loss as older horses are more prone to dental problems and very young horses more susceptible to parasites. Arthritis and chronic lameness can make it harder for your horse to compete with others for feed.

### Monitoring Weight Loss

In addressing the causes of weight loss in your horse, it is imperative that you first know if your horse is gaining or losing weight. I recommend that you use a weight tape to record your horse's weight monthly, since gradual weight loss can sometimes be hard to notice under a long winter coat. Also, if you blanket your horse be sure to remove the blanket periodically to check your horse's body condition.



### Addressing Nutritional Concerns

The next step is to take a look at the pellets or sweet feed you are feeding your horse. Weigh your grain scoop to see how much grain you are actually feeding your horse. The simple first step to addressing weight loss is to increase the amount of grain you are feeding. Allow your horse to have continuous access to free-choice hay, Increasing hay quality, or changing the sweet feed to a senior feed (or a higher protein and energy grain) can also be used to increase your horse's weight. Determine if your horse needs a vitamin and mineral supplement. In general, if a horse is consuming a commercially formulated grain made specifically for horses and you are feeding the amount recommended on the feed bag for your horse's weight, then that grain should supply all the vitamins and minerals that your horse needs. However, if your horse is consuming less than what the feed bag recommends or you are not using a commercially made feed then you should add a vitamin/mineral supplement to your horse's diet. If you have question concerning your horse's diet feel free to call one of our equine veterinarians. I often find owners spending money they don't have to on extra supplements that duplicate what is already in the feed bag. Your veterinarian can tell you through blood tests if you need to supplement nutrients such as Vitamin E and Selenium which can be associated with weight loss and other diseases.

### Deworming

The second thing to address in weight loss is parasite control. Worm burdens vary widely from farm to farm depending on the number of horses the amount of pasture available, and the age of the horses. Do not rely solely on the feed store's deworming protocol. Though this may be a good start, I often find owners over deworming their horses, spending money they don't have to, and risking parasite resistance to dewormers from overuse. In general, if you have a thin horse it is a good idea to deworm it. However, it is even more helpful to collect a fecal sample first, then to deworm the horse. This way we can determine if parasites are actually contributing to the horse's weight loss, or if we need to look somewhere else. If your horses are maintaining good weight, I recommend taking individual fecal samples to determine parasite levels at the time of your next scheduled deworming. If very low levels of parasites are found, then that deworming can be skipped. This method can be used to determine what deworming interval is appropriate for your horses. I recommend asking your veterinarian to help you develop a deworming protocol specific for your horses' needs. If you would like our clinic to run fecal egg counts on your horses, just collect three to four fecal balls from each horse (or at least the thinnest). These should be fresh and delivered to the clinic within 24hr of collection.



### Dental Problems

This is a very common cause of weight loss, and any thin horse should have its teeth examined for sharp points. The clearest sign of dental problems in a horse is dropping wads or "cuds" of partially chewed hay or grass when eating hay or grazing. A horse with bad teeth may often be able to graze fine and eat grain without a problem and and so gains weight and does well when the pasture is good. Sharp hooks and points can cause a horse to be sensitive to a bit on one or both sides of its mouth. Even overweight horses can have bad teeth. Yet, putting off addressing dental problems is not a good weight loss program. Dental problems lead to poorly chewed hay, which in turn often predisposes a horse to choke and to colic from impactions. In addition, dental problems left untreated usually get worse, take longer to fix when finally addressed, and can shorten the life span of the horse's teeth and thus of your horse. Most horses don't have to be floated every year, but I recommend having your vet check your horses' teeth each year. The Perry Veterinary Clinic does not charge for checking teeth when you have us give our standard equine vaccine regimen. The practice has multiple veterinarians with interest in equine dentistry for any dental work your horse might need.



### Social Interactions and Competition Between Horses

As most horse owners have witnessed, horses can be very aggressive toward each other. If you are group feeding your horses you have the added complication of the natural hierarchy of dominance. Not only can younger, smaller, more timid horses be pushed away from the hay feeder, but they may be experiencing high levels of stress which not only includes expending more energy, but can predispose to health problems like stomach ulcers and colic. In general, it is important that horses be fed their grain separately, and should be grouped according to age, size, and sex. Sometimes separation anxiety (the horse that hates to be stalled away from his buddies) or even bad habits like cribbing can contribute to weight loss.



### Chronic Disease

If you have addressed the other causes of weight loss, and your horse is still losing weight it may be due to a chronic disease process. Lameness, heaves, chronic diarrhea, stomach ulcers, neoplasia (cancer), Cushing's, liver and kidney disease, chronic infections, and neurologic conditions all can affect apprehension of food, and can cause weight loss.

#### Equine Special

Routine equine work scheduled before 3/31/2011, will receive **\$10 off** the equine call charge.

A brief physical exam is included at no charge during vaccine visits that include Rabies, Calvenza, and West Nile Combo per horse.

To schedule a visit from one of our vets for a physical exam and to further discuss weight loss and other concerns with your horse, please contact

**Perry Vet Large Animal Service at (585) 969-9115.**

**Wishing you and yours  
a safe and happy  
holiday season!**

From everyone  
at  
**Perry Veterinary Clinic**



### WELCOME Dr. Ashley Vranich

The Partners of the Perry Veterinary Clinic, PLLC are pleased to have Dr. Ashley Vranich as an Associate Veterinarian on staff. Dr. Vranich's practice will include equine, food and companion animals. Dr. Vranich was raised in Virginia on a beef cattle farm. After her undergraduate studies at Hollins University in Roanoke, VA, she attended Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine in Blacksburg, VA, earning her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree. While studying for her veterinary degree she externed at the Perry Veterinary Clinic, PLLC so she will be familiar to many clients. In announcing the appointment of Dr.

Vranich, Dr. Stephen Stoddard, Senior Managing Partner, stated that "Dr. Vranich's appointment is another indication that the Perry Veterinary Clinic, PLLC is continuing its commitment to providing the best veterinary care to all species. Dr. Ashley Vranich is married to Dr. Leo Vranich, also an associate veterinarian at the firm.



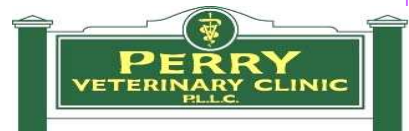
### Welcome Dr. Kristen Williams

The Partners of the Perry Veterinary Clinic, PLLC are pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Kristin Williams as an Associate Veterinarian. Dr. Williams is a mixed practitioner with primary interests in equine and companion animal medicine. Dr. Williams attended Dartmouth College and worked as a financial/marketing analyst before returning to college where she earned her DVM at Tufts-Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine in 2008. Following graduation she accepted a position with Foxcroft Veterinary Services in Dover-Foxcroft, Maine.

Dr. Williams' husband, Dr. David Hernke is also a new Associate Veterinarian at the clinic. Dr. Williams has had little exposure to Western New York prior to moving here but is looking forward to learning about the area and serving our clients.

A copy of all newsletters from the Perry Vet Clinic are available at [www.perryvet.com](http://www.perryvet.com)  
Please contact the clinic to be added to the newsletter mailing list.

To place a farm supply order:      Or, visit the Farm Store at the Perry Vet Clinic:  
Phone: (585) 969-9120                      Mon-Fri                      7am - 5pm  
Fax: (585) 237-5544                         Sat                              7am - Noon



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