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Equine Metabolic Syndrome

Equine metabolic syndrome (EMS) can be likened to human type II diabetes. It is characterised by:

- 1) Being overweight and/or having abnormal fat distribution
- 2) Having abnormally high levels of blood insulin (the hormone controlling blood sugar)
- 3) A failure of the body to respond to circulating insulin (insulin resistance)

Importantly EMS is associated with **laminitis**, ranging from acute severe laminitis to low grade chronic laminitis which can be difficult to control despite good dietary management and veterinary treatment.

Certain breeds are particularly susceptible to EMS, particularly native British breeds.

Symptoms

- Recurrent laminitis
- Abnormal fat deposits such as around the eyes

Diagnosis

Your vet will probably take one or two **blood samples** to help in diagnosing the condition. Your horse/pony may need to be starved for a short period beforehand but your vet will tell you if this is the case.

Repeat samples may be taken after a period of treatment to reassess your horse or pony.





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Treatment

Treatment mainly focuses on weight loss. This can be achieved by a strict feeding programme such as below:

Feed 1.5% of Bodyweight total intake made up of:

- Hay – weighed and then preferably soaked
- Chaff – to disguise any medications
- Feed balancer – to ensure adequate vitamins and minerals

It is important to consult your vet before embarking on any new feeding regime to make sure that it is the right one for your horse/pony.

Where possible **daily exercise** will aid weight loss and improve insulin sensitivity.

Obtaining and maintaining your horse/ponies correct body weight is vitally important. If you are unsure ask your vet to show you how to use a **weigh tape** correctly and asses **body condition score** – this will help you monitor your horse or ponies progress.

Restricting grazing using a **muzzle** or a **starvation paddock** will help reduce dietary intake whilst maintaining exercise during turnout. Simply reducing turnout is not sufficient as many horses can consume their whole daily requirements of food in just 2-3 hours grazing!!

Soaking hay can be a useful way of reducing sugar and therefore calorific content.

It is a good idea when restricting grazing and soaking hay to include a **dietary balancer** to ensure your horse or pony gets the correct levels of vitamins and minerals.

