Tackling Equine Obesity: A Collaborative Approach to Healthier Horses

At SPILLERS, we are dedicated to ending equine obesity in the UK by 2035. Our mission is driven by a commitment to the wellbeing of horses and a passion for promoting better horse management among owners. With significant investments in education and awareness campaigns, we aim to equip horse owners with practical tips and advice to combat obesity. Our SPILLERS Slimmers' Club, boasting over 11,000 members, offers a supportive community where members can share advice, camaraderie, and ideas.

One of the experts contributing to this mission is Sophie Allain, an animal osteopath with a deep passion for holistic animal care. Sophie, a distinction graduate from the European School of Animal Osteopathy (E.S.A.O), has been assisting dogs and horses for nine years. Her insights into the impacts of obesity on horses and ponies provide valuable guidance for horse owners.



Common Issues in Obese Horse and Ponies

Sophie Allain identifies several common issues in obese horses and ponies including:

- **Muscle and Fascia Tension:** Increased weight puts extra strain on muscles and fascia, leading to general tension.

- **Reduced Joint Range of Motion:** Obese horses often suffer from a reduced range of motion in their joints, sometimes coupled with inflammation.

- **Altered Gait:** The excess weight can change a horse’s gait, leading to further complications.

In contrast, horses of a healthy weight may experience these issues sporadically and usually localised to specific areas rather than being generalised.

Biomechanical and Physiological Impacts

Obesity affects the biomechanics and overall movement patterns of horses. Overweight horses often exhibit reduced joint movement amplitude and a slower gait. They may also adopt compensatory postures, such as a cow-hocked stance, to balance their enlarged abdomen. This alters the load on joints, increasing the risk of arthritis and muscle overuse injuries.

“In Osteopathy, we believe that a change in the natural function of a part of the body will negatively impact its structure. Changing the load, or the load direction on a muscle will definitely make it more prone to injury.”

Impact of Misconceptions and Lack of Awareness

Sophie highlights a critical issue: many horse owners are not aware that their horses are overweight. The normalisation of overweight domestic animals in society contributes to this lack of awareness. Obesity can lead to reductions in performance and comes with a number of health and welfare risks including increased joint strain, heat intolerance and increased risk of laminitis and insulin dysregulation.

“We are accustomed in our society to the sight of overweight domestic animals. So, I think the issue is often that owners are not always aware that their horses are overweight.”

Encouraging success

Sophie has seen notable improvements in the health and mobility of her dog patients following weight loss, which provides hope for similar outcomes in horses. Some of her equine patients are in the early stages of their weight loss journey, and Sophie is working hard to support them. Continuous education and commitment from owners are crucial for achieving long-term success.

Are you looking for advice and support?

At SPILLERS, we believe that through collective effort and education, we can tackle equine obesity and ensure a healthier future for horses across the UK. Join our Slimmers' Club today and become part of a supportive community dedicated to making a difference.

Our thanks to Sophie for her valuable insights and tips. For more expert advice from Sophie, visit www.asanimalosteopathy.com or contact Sophie Allain at

allain.sophie@hotmail.fr.

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