

## FACTSHEET: OWNERS

# FEEDING AND MANAGING THE UNDERWEIGHT DONKEY

*A donkey is considered underweight if their body condition score (BCS) is 2 or less (on a 1 – 5 scale).*

### What causes weight loss in donkeys?

Weight loss can occur for a number of reasons, try to establish why your donkey is underweight before making changes to their diet. Observe your donkey for signs of inappetance. A feed test is always a good idea; give the donkey some feed and watch to make sure that they have an appetite and that they can chew and swallow the food. Watch carefully for sham eating and check for quidding.



**i** Sham eating is giving the impression of taking food into the mouth, chewing and swallowing whilst actually ingesting very little.

**i** Quidding is the dropping of balls of partially-chewed food into the feed trough, bucket or on the floor instead of swallowing it.

Arrange a visit from your vet to rule out any underlying health issues.

### WEIGHT LOSS MAY BE RELATED TO:

- previous neglect
- age
- dental problems
- health issues
- loss of a companion
- time of year
- quality of feed sources.

It is important to have your donkey's teeth checked, either by your vet or by a qualified equine dental technician (EDT). They will look for any dental problems that may be contributing to weight loss. They will also advise you of any issues likely to affect the type of feed your donkey can eat. Ideally, you should have your donkey's teeth checked at least once a year, regardless of whether it has dental problems or not.



## FEEDING AND MANAGING THE UNDERWEIGHT DONKEY

### How should an underweight donkey be managed?

- Record your donkey's BCS and heart girth measurement every month to monitor weight loss or gain. It is important to remember that you should use the specific body condition scoring tool for donkeys, rather than the tool for horses and ponies, and that it is important to use your hands because the thick coat can hide any loss of condition.

See *Factsheets: How to Carry Out Body Condition Scoring and Body Condition Score Chart* for more information.

- Always provide shelter and consider providing rugs during the colder months. This will help your underweight donkey to keep warm and conserve energy.
- Perform regular faecal egg count tests and seek guidance from your vet or an SQP as to the most appropriate worming strategy.

See *Factsheet: Guide to Worming Your Donkey* for more information.

### What should an underweight donkey be fed?

- Assuming your donkey has no dental problems, free access to straw and good quality hay or high-fibre haylage should form the main part of their diet.
- If your donkey has poor teeth, consider replacing all long fibre forages (straw, hay and haylage) with appropriate short chopped (chaff) products.

See *Factsheet: Feeding your donkey with dental problems* for more information

- Small additional fibre or oil based feeds might need to be considered to boost energy intake.
- Fibre pellets, unmolassed beet pulp and/or unmolassed chopped fibre (chaff) products can all be fed to encourage weight gain.
- Alfalfa, in short chop or pellet form, can be a useful addition to the diet as long as the donkey has good teeth and is not suffering from liver or kidney problems.
- Small quantities of high fat supplements (often based on rice bran), or vegetable based oils can be added to the feed to top up energy levels as long as the donkey is not suffering from liver or kidney problems.
- Ensure the combined sugar + starch content of the diet is kept under 10%.
- Unless feeding a complete feed (i.e. one which has vitamins and minerals added) consider feeding a forage balancer to supply essential protein, vitamins and minerals.



**Always check the recommended feeding guidelines listed on the label before feeding any commercial product.**



**Ensure any changes to your donkey's diet are made very gradually to avoid digestive upset.**

