

## FEEDING & MANAGING THE OVERWEIGHT DONKEY

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**THE DONKEY  
SANCTUARY**

Weight loss should be gradual and is achieved by choosing appropriate feeds that are low in energy but high enough in fibre to allow the donkey to eat to appetite. Successful weight loss involves dietary changes plus management changes to increase activity levels. Donkeys who have been obese for a long period of time may never lose calcified fat pads on the neck and trunk, this should be accounted for when condition scoring.



## MANAGING WEIGHT LOSS

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### THINGS YOU SHOULD DO

- Good quality, clean feeding straw should make up the majority of the donkey's diet.
- Barley straw is best but wheat straw can also be fed, if the donkey has poor teeth feed low calorie short chops in place of straw.
- Supplement straw with a feed balancer to provide vitamins and minerals.
- Encourage owners to feed 'little and often' to ensure donkeys are trickle feeding as they would in the wild; if possible encourage ad lib feeding.
- Assess grazing management, and always restrict by strip grazing as donkeys will gain weight on grass; bare paddocks, sand schools or bark chipped exercise areas may be more appropriate.



- Think about the location of feeders, water, and shelter to encourage maximum movement throughout the day and if possible ridden, driven or in hand exercise.
- Condition score and take heart girth measurements monthly and use The Donkey Sanctuary Weight Estimator to calculate weight and monitor weight loss.



### THINGS YOU SHOULD AVOID

- Don't starve the overweight donkey as this may cause unnecessary stress and hyperlipaemia.
- Always avoid all cereal based feeds, as they are too high in starch and sugar and will encourage weight gain as well as being implicated in the onset of gastric ulcers and laminitis.
- Don't forget to check straw for retained grain, shake over a tarpaulin before feeding if needed.
- Don't feed sugary treats, if treats are needed for training then choose a high fibre nut, and provide non-feed boredom breakers such as horse toys, old wellies, and ash/beech/hazel logs.
- Don't expect results overnight, weight loss should be gradual at not more than 5kg a month.

### POSSIBLE DIETS THAT CAN BE USED

- Good quality straw, bought from a trusted supplier should be the first option. Barley straw is most suitable for donkeys, but wheat straw may be suitable if the donkey has good teeth, oat straw is higher in calories so would need to be fed in smaller quantities.
- If straw is unavailable haylage such as High Fibre or Timothy Horsehage may be fed in limited quantities, don't confuse this with farmer's haylage which can be extremely variable in energy levels.
- Donkeys with poor teeth could be fed Mollichaff Donkey in place of straw, provide 2 to 3 kg per day to satisfy appetite for an average donkey.
- Add a feed balancer for a straw only diet e.g. Top Spec Donkey Forage Balancer fed at 100g per 100 kg bodyweight per day.



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The Donkey Sanctuary was founded by Dr Elisabeth Svendsen MBE in 1969.

The Donkey Sanctuary (registered charity number 264818) and its sole corporate trustee, The Donkey Sanctuary Trustee Limited (Company number 07328588), both have their registered office at Slade House Farm, Sidmouth, EX10 0NU.

Incorporating: The Elisabeth Svendsen Trust for Children and Donkeys (EST); The International Donkey Protection Trust (IDPT).

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