



Wilton Hunt Branch of the Pony Club Getting Your Horse or Pony Fit and Ready for Competition or Camp

Getting your horse fit takes time so if starting from scratch this should begin at least 6 weeks before the competition or camp.

Before you start:

- Make an appointment with the farrier to shoe: this avoids sore feet due to work.
- Check your tack: Make sure it fits and the flocking in the panels of the saddle is not lumpy! Also, check that the numnah you are putting under the saddle is clean and in good condition. Check stitching on stirrup leathers. Ensure the bit is not worn and causing sores on the lips. Check tack rules <https://pcuk.org/officials/health-and-safety/dress-and-tack/>
- Check your horse or pony has a negative worm egg count or a wormer has been given.
- Check that their vaccinations are up to date.

For horses and ponies starting on or after 1 January 2024

First vaccine day 0

Second vaccine day 21-60

You can attend activities 7 full days (more than 1 week) after the second vaccination.

Third vaccine 120- 180

Boosters minimum 12 months but 6 months recommended for those competing regularly.

For horses and ponies which started vaccination before 1 January 2024

First vaccination day 0

Second vaccination day 21-92

Third vaccination 150-215 days

Boosters minimum 12 months but 6 months recommended for those competing regularly.

- Tidy manes and tails which may mean pulling or re-hogging. Remember to re-do feathers if your pony/cob has them and they are clipped. Clip if necessary. Remember those with Cushing's disease may need clipping, even in summer, so that sweating and the risk of heatstroke are minimised.

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Exercise

- To get your horse fit from scratch a basic program would be:
 - 2 weeks walk
 - 2 weeks walk and trot
 - 2 weeks walk, trot and canter
- Start with 30 minutes and build to 60 minutes. Most ponies are already doing a basic/moderate level of work prior to camp/competition. Ideally you would work your horse or pony daily with one rest day per week but work on at least 5 days is ideally needed. If you are unable to ride one day then leading from another horse or lunging for 30 minutes will help maintain progress. Once trotting has been started at least 10 minutes continuous trotting twice weekly has been shown to increase aerobic fitness.
- For some activities such as racing, cross country, eventing or endurance, it is likely that 8-12 weeks of increasing work will be required. Jumping requires strength and power as well as suppleness and hill work and grid work may be appropriate.

Fit not Fat!

- Obesity is the biggest welfare issue in the UK and more than half of horses and ponies are overweight. Reasons to diet:
 1. An overweight horse will struggle to perform especially carrying a rider.
 2. Obesity increases the risk of laminitis, equine metabolic syndrome (EMS), which is similar to type 2 diabetes in people.
 3. Excess weight causes various other lameness' by putting extra strain on the limbs and can slow recovery in the same way.
 4. One of the commonest causes of colic that requires surgery or is fatal, is where there are fatty growths that strangulate the intestines.

It's not OK to have an overweight horse or pony any more than it is to have an emaciated one which needs more food. **Body condition score your horse or pony.** Follow this link <https://www.bhs.org.uk/horse-care-and-welfare/health-care-management/horse-health/fat-scoring/>

Use a weigh tape to estimate current weight and then use it weekly to monitor progress with weight loss. As a rough rule, each unit of the 1-5 Body Condition Score (BCS) scale above which your pony is over BCS 3 will require 10kg of weight loss per 100 kg body weight. For example, if your 400kg Connemara pony is fat and has a BCS 4/5 then it is 1 unit over body condition score 3 and is likely to need to lose 10kg x 4=40kg. Weight loss should be gradual over around 6-12 weeks. Acting now means your horse or pony will be healthier, happier and better able to perform for you.

Good luck and have fun!

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