



Alpaca Body Condition Scoring

WHY IS BODY CONDITION SCORING IMPORTANT FOR ALPACAS?

Combined with routine body weight monitoring, body condition assessment is a key indicator of an alpaca's nutritional status. It may help owners become aware of possible health issues before other signs appear.

- Overweight alpacas are more prone to heat stress, infertility, difficult births, poor lactation, neonatal mortality
- Underweight alpacas may suffer nutritional deficiencies, poor skin/fiber quality, poor reproduction, unthrifty crias

For alpacas in particular, there is no substitute for hands-on evaluation of body condition.

- Variations in alpaca frame sizes mean that body weight comparisons among individuals may not be relevant
- Longer fiber staples can mask significant differences in condition
- Later stages of pregnancy can hide their actual status

Always compare to a standard guide and review prior scores for the same individual, rather than comparing to other alpacas.

ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES & TIPS

Body condition scoring (BCS) is performed by visual observation and feeling of the bony structures. A flat hand is passed firmly over important points on the body, feeling for sharp features and/or pressing to feel for excess fat. The goal is to assess the amount of cover between bony projections and the skin.

Key areas include:

The area around and just behind the shoulders

- The shoulder bone should be palpable but not sharp; a thin alpaca will begin to show a diagonal crest from the point of the shoulder up towards the withers
- The withers should be rounded and not sharp; a thin individual will have a sharp backbone around and behind this area
- The sides should show a tuck-in just behind the shoulders; on an overweight alpaca, this area will be filled in

The ribs and spine

- Should be slightly palpable with firm pressure, but without spaces between individual ribs or vertebrae, and without a spinal crest.

The zone between the ribs and the hips

- Vertebrae extending upward and to the sides should be palpable but rounded; on thin alpacas, these bones will begin to project, forming a vertical crest and horizontal "shelf"
- The flank should have a smooth appearance, with a slight tuck in front of the hind legs. On thin individuals, there will be a sunken area just below the vertebral "shelf;" overweight alpacas will lose the inward tuck and show no contour at all.

The hips

- Should be rounded but with palpable bony structures. Thin alpacas will have sharpness at hip points and near the tailbone, with a diagonal crest appearing along the rump; overweight alpacas will accumulate fat on top of the rump and near the tail, and bones will be difficult to feel.

The sternal/keel and inguinal areas, between the front and back legs

- Thin alpacas will have little to no fat, appropriate alpacas will have slight to moderate fat, and overweight individuals will have obvious fat bulges.

The abdomen closest to the ground

- Will show fat accumulation in overweight alpacas.

When to assess body condition

- For all herd members, it is important to assess body condition throughout the year, as pasture and hay quality changes, and energy demands fluctuate with season and weather.
- For reproductive females, it is important to perform an assessment at mid-pregnancy and early to mid-lactation.

INTERPRETING BODY CONDITION SCORE

This table shows the appropriate ranges of BCS for alpacas at various life stages. Individuals with scores outside of these ranges may need a medical evaluation or change in feeding plan.

Alpaca	Appropriate Body Condition Score
Growing (<12 months)	3.0 – 3.5
Adult male	2.5 – 3.5
Non-pregnant adult female	2.5 – 3.5
Pregnant female	3.0 – 3.5
Geriatric alpaca	2.5 – 3.0

Alpaca Body Condition Scoring Guide

Description	Score	Side View*	Top View*	Front*	Back*
<p>THIN:</p> <p>Deep depression on either side of dorsal vertebral processes. Sunken-in flank, with bony "shelf" just above it. Sharp shoulder, withers, and hip bones; prominent ribs. Prominent V-shape to keel, and sharp inverted V between rear legs.</p>	<p>1.0</p> <p>1.5</p> <p>2.0</p>				
<p>APPROPRIATE:</p> <p>Slight cover over bony structures; ribs and spine palpated with slight pressure. Body contours visible but smooth in appearance. Healthy muscle mass. Slight to moderate fat in keel and between rear legs.</p>	<p>2.5</p> <p>3.0</p> <p>3.5</p>				
<p>OVERWEIGHT:</p> <p>Bone structure palpable only with moderate to firm pressure, or not palpable. Little to no body contour visible; rounded appearance. Fat pads visible over keel, between rear legs, and possibly around tailhead.</p>	<p>4.0</p> <p>4.5</p> <p>5.0</p>				

*Appearance will change based on fiber length and coverage, as well as degree of pregnancy. Manual evaluation is important.