

Many NZ pet sheep are overweight.

Sheep are generally at their fattest when the grass growth peaks in Spring or they are fed high quantities of supplementary feed. Obese sheep are prone to a whole range of health issues including the following:

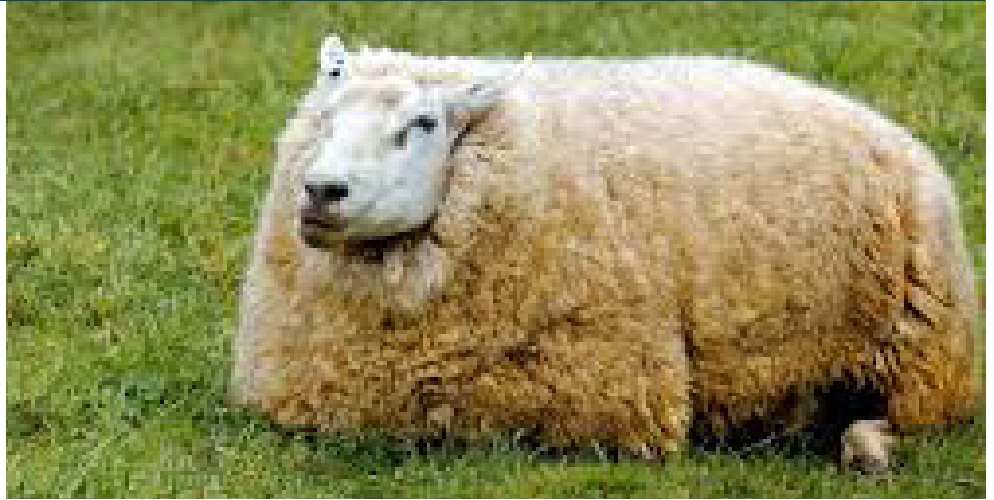
- birthing issues;
- unable to stand when pregnant;
- sleepy sickness;
- ketosis;
- uterine and rectal prolapses / bearings;
- lameness issues due to being so heavy;
- arthritis and much, much more.

It is important to reduce the weight of your sheep gradually, as any sudden fasting can cause severe disease such as ketosis. Ketosis occurs when sheep with abundant fat reserves are fasted suddenly, causing fat reserves to be broken down inappropriately. Sheep with ketosis are usually very sick and a common sign of ketosis is wool falling out easily.

What can I do?

Reducing food intake is key. Prior to putting your sheep on a diet, the sheep's body condition should be assessed using the **BCS guidelines provided on the next page.**

Whilst it can be useful to determine the live weight of your sheep, the actual weight does not tell you anything about it's 'condition'. The condition indicates how fat or skinny the animal is. A heavy sheep could be skinny and a light sheep could be fat – so you need both live weight and condition to get the fully story. A vet or vet technician can demonstrate the correct way in which this is done. Determining the condition of your sheep prior to starting a diet will help guide you towards an ideal weight.



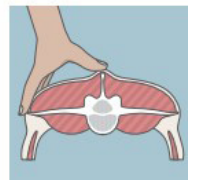
SHEEP: A GUIDE TO Weight Watches

Reducing feed intake

- The feeding of any hard feed or supplementary feed such as sheep nuts or grains should be stopped.
- The flock should be offered gradually less and less pasture to graze on.
- Strip grazing-sheep can be restricted to a narrow strip of the paddock using electric fencing or other fencing methods. As well as limiting the amount of grass available, this forces sheep to walk up and down the strip to graze, causing them to expend a few more calories. Don't forget to provide plenty of water and shade when strip grazing in case it gets warm.
- Once the weight loss plan has started, the condition of your sheep should be checked on a monthly basis to ensure that they are not losing too much condition.
- Sheep should **ALWAYS** have plenty of water available.

Condition scoring sheep

BCS is a valuable management tool that can be used to evaluate the feeding program and the need for changes. Since there is a wide variation in weight, body condition is usually a better indicator of condition than weight itself. BCS is carried out using your hands to palpate certain regions of the body. This is often easier on shorter wool sheep. Stand at the side of the sheep and lay your thumb along the backbone - pointing forward, use your fingers to feel the bones at the end of the "short ribs". Feel the muscle and fat cover around the end of the short ribs and backbone.



*BCS = Body condition scoring



The scores used

In NZ the score system most widely used is 1 to 5, with 1 being an emaciated sheep, 3 being a sheep in average condition, and 5 being an obese sheep. Most sheep have body condition scores between 2 and 4.

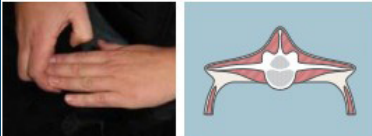

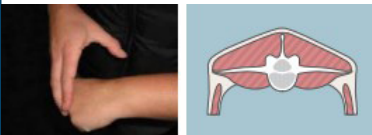
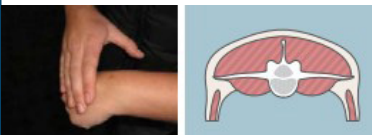

A ewe's body condition score will change throughout her production cycle. The three most important times to body condition score ewes are prior to breeding, late pregnancy, and weaning.

What to feel for

A BCS estimates condition, fat and muscle. The backbone of the sheep (spine) has bones sticking up (vertical processes) and bones sticking out the side (horizontal processes).

Both of these are used as the location points for scoring. These bones are covered first by muscles and then by a layer of fat. You have to assess both of these to decide on a score.

Annual Event	Target BCS
Mating	3-4
5 weeks pre-lambing	3
Lambing	3
Weaning	3

Body Condition Score (BCS)	Score Details – how it feels compared to an 'average' hand
1	 <p>The ends of the short ribs feel like the ends of your fingertips, when you push your fingers under the short ribs there is no muscle underneath, just skin. Spine is prominent, there is virtually no muscle on the back and it feels concave. You can feel the short ribs individually from above.</p>
2	 <p>Muscle and fat depth under short ribs equivalent to distance from first knuckle to finger tip. You can feel indentations between the short ribs when you run your fingers across the ends of them. Can feel spine easily, back muscle is slightly concave and not rounded. You can't easily palpate the short ribs from above.</p>
3	 <p>Muscle and fat depth under short ribs about equivalent to distance from 3rd knuckle to 2nd knuckle when fingers are flexed. Need moderate pressure to feel short ribs. Back muscle becoming rounded.</p>
4	 <p>'Prime'. Can feel short ribs with really strong pressure, back is rounded with plenty of fat cover, muscle under short ribs deep; nearly the distance from first knuckles to the beginning of your wrist joint.</p>
5	 <p>Obese, fat rolls either side of spine, spine is in a dimple, impossible to feel short ribs, fat either side of tail head. Almost never see in a commercial flock.</p>