

Alpaca Care and Management

Dedicated to the health of your business...

Feeding

An alpaca's diet needs to be balanced and provide enough energy to help the alpaca maintain a healthy weight. Being underweight or overweight can lead to serious health problems. We assess feed intake using DMI (dry matter intake). Dry matter is how much feed is present when all the water has been removed, for example, lush pasture is around 20% DM and hay is approximately 90% DM. An adult alpaca will need 1.5% of its body weight in DM per day e.g. a 70kg adult will need about 1kg DM. This is equivalent to 5kg of lush pasture or 1.2kg of hay. Alpacas should always have access to roughage as they are ruminants so need this for a healthy digestive system.

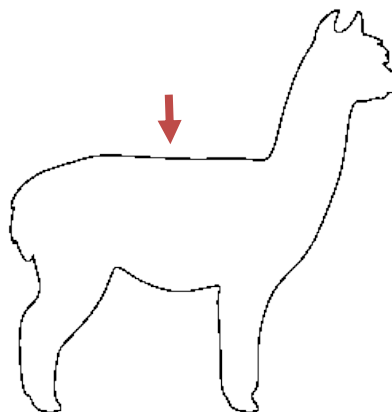
All of the alpaca's dietary requirements must be met in the dry matter. Good quality pasture may be adequate, however you can supplement the diet with concentrates if needed. Concentrates should only make up a maximum of 25% of the daily intake – a 70kg adult should have a maximum of 250g of concentrate daily. A good additional feed is **Camelibra** which is fed at 1g/kg of bodyweight.

You need to check the body condition of your alpaca's regularly. If they are underweight they will require more feed and overweight will require less. If you are a breeder, alpaca's will require more energy when they are growing, pregnant and lactating.

Body Condition Scoring

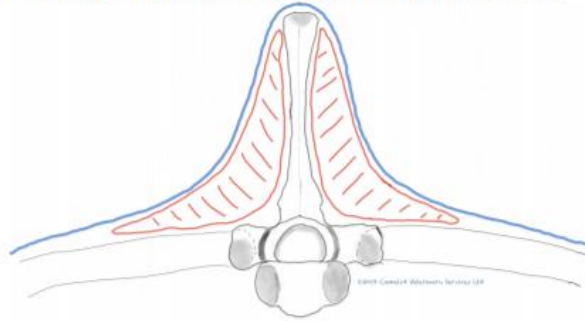
You should body condition score every month in healthy animals. We give the animal a score from 1-10, with an ideal being 5.5/6.

To score, you should feel the animal in the mid-back region.

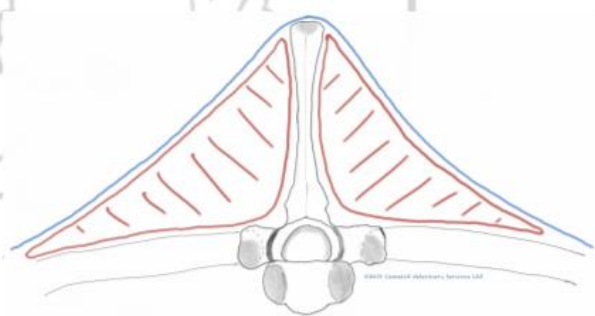


Here you are feeling the muscle and fat with are covering the transverse processes on the vertebrae of the spine.

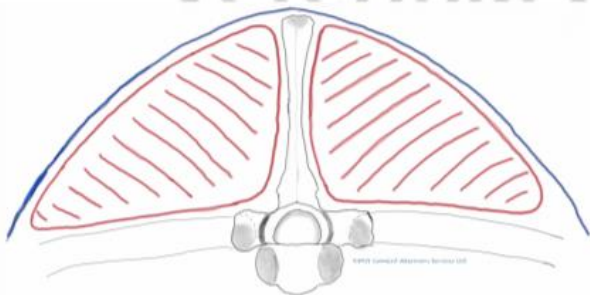
BCS 2/10, Very thin; can fit fingers easily between ribs.



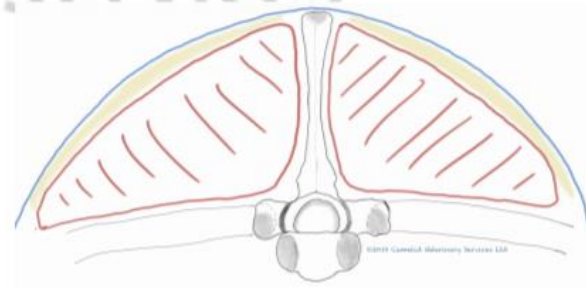
BCS 4/10, slightly thin. Ribs are easy to feel.



BCS 6/10, Ideal. Slightly rounded profile, ribs palpable but feels healthy.



BCS 7.5/10, Overweight. Have to palpate more firmly to feel ribs. Will also have fat padding under the tail.



Reference – www.ukalpacavet.co.uk

There is a helpful video on Youtube – ‘How to body condition score alpacas’.

Teeth

Alpaca's have 6 incisor teeth which grow continuously. These are located on the bottom jaw and oppose the hard pad on the upper jaw. Grazing should wear the teeth down however if they do not oppose properly the teeth are not worn down and they can hinder eating. The molars can also become sharp and may need rasping down. We recommend getting an equine dentist to do this as many will have camelid experience, please contact us and we can give you some more information.

Foot trimming

The foot is made up of two toes, with a soft pad covered by a toenail. The toenails will need trimming **at least 3-4 times a year** but it will depend on the environment the animals are

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living in and the rate at which the nails grow. You can trim nails with a pair of straight edged cutters such as secateurs and you will need 1 person to restrain the animal. You can then pick up each foot and trim each nail down so it is level with the soft pad. Be careful not to cut too deeply, but if you do draw blood don't panic! Give the area a good covering with some **blue engemycin spray**.



<https://www.incaalpaca.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/10toenails.pdf>

Shearing

Shearing should be done in May/June before the weather gets too warm. It will keep the alpaca comfortable during the summer and **help prevent flystrike**. You can also sell the fleece! Shearing is a good time for other management tasks such as nail clipping and body condition scoring.

Fly strike occurs when flies lay their eggs in the animals fleece and the maggots start eating away at the skin. It can be prevented by shearing, using a pour on fly repellent and regular

checking of animals. Please contact us for more information or if you suspect an animal has flystrike.

Vaccination

You should vaccinate routinely against Clostridial bacteria. There are multiple strains of this bacteria which can cause some nasty diseases, such as tetanus and botulism. As there are no licensed products for alpacas we use sheep vaccine called Lambivac or Heptavac. Most alpacas will need an initial course of 2 doses 4-6 weeks apart then a booster annually. Cria's will need a different protocol. Please let your vet know if you need to start vaccinating and we can write a protocol for you.

Vitamin D

As alpacas as used to sunnier climes, they need to be supplemented with vitamin D throughout the winter. Vitamin D is important for bone growth and skin health and inadequate levels of this can cause Rickets. You can supplement them either orally or with injections. **All animals should get at least 1 injection in November and 1 injection in January. Growing animals should receive a 3rd in March.**

Worming

Alpacas are susceptible to many parasites and do not build up an immunity like cows and sheep do. Therefore it is important to manage pastures well and perform regular faecal egg counts.

You should rotate the pasture on which the alpacas graze so that each pasture can get at least 6 weeks rest to lower the worm burden on it. We recommend a **3 week rotation with 3 different fields**. Also, try to clear a field of poo after use to help limit worm burdens.

We can perform faecal egg counts to see if and how many worms are present in the alpacas gut. This will allow us to recommend a suitable product for you to use to treat your animals. We recommend testing every 2-3 months and if your animals are losing weight or have diarrhoea. To test, please bring in a fresh poo sample to the practice, the fresher the sample then the more reliable the results! Try to get a mixture of samples from a group or an individual sample if testing due to weight loss or diarrhoea. **Please try to drop samples off in the morning as there is no guarantee they will be tested if you drop off after lunchtime.**

Worming can be done by using an oral drench, an injection or a pour on depending on the product. You can administer these yourself but if you need any help please just ask a vet, we are happy to teach you!

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Wet pastures can lead to liver fluke. We can send off poo samples to a lab to test for this. Your vet will tell you if this is something worth investigating.

Other

It's a good idea to keep a diary/calendar or a book to help plan and record management and treatment of you alpacas. For any medication, you should record:

- **Name of the animal treated**
- **Name of the product/drug**
- **Dosage**
- **Batch number and expiry date**

You can also use this book to keep a record of vaccinations, nail trims and body condition scores.

If you are at all concerned about your animals please call us, we have a **vet available on the phone 24/7** to help you in an emergency or offer advice.

We are happy to teach you any skills you may need such as injecting, drenching and nail trimming, please just ask!

If you are planning on breeding **please let the practice know**. It is a very exciting time but also requires planning, preparation and equipment so it is best to chat with a vet and we can write a breeding programme for you.

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