HEALTH REFERENCE

Body Condition Score

A 9-point scale for judging whether a dog is too thin, ideal or carrying extra weight. Aim for a **4 or 5**.

1 Feel the ribs
Run flat hands along the chest. At ideal, each rib is easy to feel under a thin layer of fat.

2 Look from above
Stand over the dog. You should see a waist where the body narrows behind the ribs.

3 Look from the side
The belly should tuck up from the bottom of the chest toward the hind legs.

Quick hand test for ribs: Knuckles of a fist = **too thin** Back of a flat hand = **ideal** Palm = **too heavy**

Too thin

SCORES 1–3

1 Emaciated
Ribs, spine, hip bones and other bony points visible from a distance. No body fat to feel. Obvious loss of muscle.

2 Very thin
Ribs, spine and hip bones easily seen. No fat can be felt. Some muscle loss.

3 Thin
Ribs easily felt and may be visible, with no fat over them. Tops of the spine visible and hip bones becoming prominent. Deep waist and tuck.

Ideal

SCORES 4–5

4 Lean ideal
Ribs easily felt under a thin layer of fat. Waist easy to see from above. Belly clearly tucked up.

5 Ideal
Ribs felt without extra fat covering. Waist visible behind the ribs from above. Belly tucked up when viewed from the side.

Too heavy

SCORES 6–9

6		**Slightly overweight** ~10% over ideal Ribs felt under a slight excess of fat. Waist visible from above but not prominent. Tuck still present.
7		**Overweight** ~20% over ideal Ribs hard to feel under heavy fat. Fat building over the lower back and base of the tail. Waist barely visible or gone; tuck may be absent.
8		**Obese** ~30% over ideal Ribs cannot be felt without firm pressure. Heavy fat over the lower back and tail base. No waist, no tuck; belly may be rounded.
9		**Severely obese** 40%+ over ideal Large fat deposits over the chest, spine and tail base, plus fat on the neck and legs. No waist or tuck; belly clearly hangs.

Use hands and eyes together: a long or thick coat can hide ribs and waist. Each point above 5 is roughly 10% over ideal body weight.

Based on the 9-point body condition scale (Laflamme, 1997) used in WSAVA global nutrition guidelines.