

## **Animal WOFs Newsletter – July/August 2011 -**



Welcome to another *Animal WOFs for Lifestyle Blocks* newsletter.

Each issue we are covering important animal health issues relevant for that time of year. Please feel free to give us feedback or ideas for the next issue, with any topics you would like to see covered.

### **In this issue:**

**Animal Health Diary – things to watch out for at this time of year.**

**Metabolic diseases before and after birth – how to recognise a problem and fix it before it's too late.**

**The birthing kit... what to do and when to call the vet.**



# Animal Health Diary July/August



## - Seven simple suggestions for winter animal husbandry -

### 1. Calving/lambing/kidding/unpacking - Keep an eye out



for signs of approaching birth. (see feature article for more information). Ensure there is enough good quality feed available, including plenty of roughage. Keep animals due to birth soon in paddocks that are easily accessible, relatively flat with few natural hazards and good shelter. Dag and crutch ewes pre-lambing.

2. Check ewes, cows and does for signs of **sleepy sickness** (pregnancy toxaemia), especially those carrying multiple young (twins and triplets). Consider use of magnesium prior to calving to decrease risk of **milk fever and grass staggers**. (See other feature article for more information).

3. **Vaccinate** early calves and lambs against clostridial disease to prevent deaths due to Black Leg, Pulpy Kidney, Tetanus etc. This can be done from 4 weeks onwards. Take care with docking and castration of unvaccinated animals. If ewes were vaccinated prior to lambing, their lambs are protected until 12 weeks old and can be safely docked and castrated.



4. **Nitrate poisoning** is a risk with fast growing pasture after a few consecutive days of overcast conditions. If concerned about new pasture, speak to your vet. Pasture can be tested for nitrate levels.

5. Check cows for **retained foetal membranes** after calving: if membranes or discharges are still present 7 days after calving seek veterinary help.

6. Continue hoof trimming for goats and sheep and check for **footrot** in this wet time of year. Provide dry areas or concrete slabs so animals can get out of the mud and feet can dry out. If you find footrot, talk to us about treatments.



7. Consider raising a lamb or calf for **lamb and calf club** with your children. At LHVC we sell grooming kits, feeding bottles, halters and leads and have plenty of advice available for keeping the pet lambs and calves healthy. Ensure vaccination is up to date and worming is done regularly, preferably with a good quality broad spectrum drench from the vets.



Have a look at our Shoof lifestyler catalogue for some useful spring products. If we are out of stock, we are happy to order specific products in for you.

# Metabolic diseases before and after birth – how to recognise a problem and fix it before it's too late

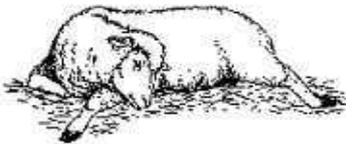
## Sleepy Sickness in sheep and goats

Ewes and does, particularly those carrying twins or triplets, can develop sleepy sickness for a few reasons: a sudden restriction or shortage of feed in the last 2 months of pregnancy, inadequate shelter during this time or concurrent problems like previous liver damage from facial eczema.

It is usually a prebirthing problem although if feeding triplets or twins, problems can occur after birth too.

### Clinical signs:

- Early in the disease the affected animal separates herself from the flock and appears depressed.
- Appetite is lost and the animal often lags behind when the flock is shifted.
- As the disease progresses she may appear blind, may wander aimlessly and show little response to the presence of a human or dog.
- Occasionally nervous twitching of the ears and eyes and around the muzzle may be noticed.



- If left untreated she will become recumbent, stargaze and eventually become comatose and die. At this stage kidney failure often develops and even with treatment, death may be inevitable.

### Treatment:

- Early vigorous treatment is essential for survival as metabolic changes become irreversible towards the later stages of the disease
- In early stages oral treatment with Ketol may be sufficient to raise blood glucose levels, in more severe cases animals may require an intravenous injection with Dextrose, other IV fluids and/or a B12 injection, given by the vet.
- Plenty of easily accessible feed and water should be offered and grazing should be encouraged.
- A caesarian section can be performed to remove the lambs or kids from the uterus and thus reduce the metabolic drain on the ewe during pregnancy.



### Prevention:

- Avoid sudden changes in feed levels and undernutrition
- Provide plenty of good quality feed for pregnant ewes, especially in late

- pregnancy and avoid sudden changes in diet
- Take care when yarding animals for shearing or other reasons, have yarded for as little a time as possible so ewes can get back to grazing fast
  - Reduce stocking rates during pregnancy, like moving rams, lambs or dry stock off the property
  - Scanning ewes to detect which are carrying multiple lambs can be done, these can then be preferentially fed.
  - Prevent liver damage from facial eczema by using zinc bullets in summer during the risk period.

*Sheep foetus scanned at 40 days of pregnancy =>*



## **Ketosis in cattle**

In cattle ketosis most commonly occurs in good conditioned cows about ten days to six weeks after calving.

It is caused by the breakdown of body fat for energy when there is insufficient energy being eaten in comparison to the requirements of peak lactation. Primary ketosis is caused by simply not enough food being available for the animal, secondary ketosis is associated with a concurrent disease that causes inappetance or digestive failure.

In well conditioned or overly fat animals ketosis can be complicated by “fat cow syndrome”. The mobilisation of energy from fat in the tissues causes deposition of fat in the liver and the so-called “fatty liver” can compromise liver function and lead to severe weight loss, debility, weakness and recumbency.



<= healthy bovine liver

fatty liver from cow =>  
with fat cow syndrome



## **Clinical signs:**

- Decrease in milk production, inappetance, loss of body weight, dullness
- Occasionally nervous signs occur, like aggression, incoordination, circling and kicking
- With secondary ketosis there may be signs of other disease processes like diarrhoea, lameness etc

**Treatment:**

- Primary ketosis is similar to sleepy sickness in sheep and goats and can be treated with intravenous Dextrose solutions and oral Ketol
- In secondary ketosis, the primary disease may require treatment too, so call the vet sooner rather than later, especially if you are dealing with a well conditioned cow.
- Provide feed and water especially if the cow is recumbent
- Recumbent cows that are unable to rise need to be lifted regularly in a cow sling or hip clamps to prevent further damage from muscle and nerve necrosis.



**Prevention:**

- Cows should not be allowed to become over-fat in late lactation and during the dry period (BCS 4 or higher out of 5), fat cows can be slimmed during the dry period before calving

Body Condition Score	Vertebrae at the middle of the back	Rear view (cross-section) of the hook bones	Side view of the line between the hook and pinbones	Cavity between tailhead and pinbone	
				Rear view	Angled view
1 Severe underconditioning					
2 Frame obvious					
3 Frame and covering well balanced					
4 Frame not as visible as covering					
5 Severe overconditioning					

<= BCS 1 & 2 = too thin  
 <= BCS 3 = just right  
 <= BCS 4 & 5 = overly fat and more prone to metabolic diseases

- In the late dry period avoid sudden feed changes and feed hay if you are feeding out grain based diets like maize
- Calve the cows on high-quality pasture and reduce stocking rates if necessary

**Milk fever in cattle**

Milk fever, or hypocalcaemia, is a metabolic condition caused by low blood calcium levels and occurs commonly around the time of calving. Due to sudden demand for calcium at the time of calving, the small pools of readily available calcium are depleted quickly and homeostatic mechanisms kick in to source more calcium from bone stores and feed. If these mechanisms fail, blood calcium levels drop below the

threshold and milk fever occurs.

It is rare in heifers and occurs mainly in high-producing dairy cattle, however cases have been seen in beef animals as well.

### Clinical signs:

- Stage 1: mild excitement, inappetance, wobbliness, constipation
- Stage 2: depression, sternal recumbency often with an S-shaped kink in the neck and the head around at the flanks, dry muzzle and cold extremities, low temperature, the stomach stops working and bloats, uterine inertia (if calving at the time, the uterus goes floppy and can't push the calf out)
- Stage 3: lying on her side, loss of consciousness, severe bloat, uterine prolapse and death



<= Cow with Stage 2, note the S shaped neck.

MILK FEVER IS A RAPIDLY PROGRESSING CONDITION AND NEEDS TREATMENT IMMEDIATELY, no matter what time of day or night, call the vet asap if you suspect milk fever!



### Treatment:

- Intravenous calcium is needed in stage 2 and 3 cases, this often results in a fast improvement in the cows condition
- Oral calcium and calcium under the skin can then be continued for a few days
- BEWARE giving intravenous calcium yourself, it needs to be given slowly and heart rate needs to be monitored during administration, as overdosing can cause cardiac arrhythmias and death

### Prevention:

- Feed low calcium feeds precalving, this increases the active uptake of calcium from the gut and increases storage of calcium in the body
- Feed hay to increase saliva production increasing Calcium uptake
- Supplement cows with magnesium (Causmag on pasture or feed or Mag sulphate in the troughs)
- Increase energy density of feed precalving by adding maize or grain, but avoid sudden changes



- Dose cows with calcium orally on the day of calving and the next few days, products like Calol or Calstart are suitable

## Grass staggers in cattle

Also called hypomagnesaemia, this disease is characterised by low Magnesium concentrations in blood and brain fluid and occurs in cattle grazed primarily on fresh, lush, rapidly growing pastures as these are often low in Magnesium.

Again this often occurs in early lactation when metabolic needs are higher.

### Clinical signs:

- Peracute form: sudden onset of convulsions (seizures), leading to death within a few minutes
- Acute form: after an initial phase of hyperexcitability, aggression and muscle tremors, incoordination occurs and can lead to convulsions and death

**BEWARE:** cows with grass staggers can be abnormally aggressive in the first stages, so take care when handling and call the vet quickly. Also be careful with convulsing animals and stay well away from the thrashing legs and head.



### Treatment:

- Slow IV administration of Magnesium and Calcium is needed and a higher concentration of magnesium sulphate is available for use under the skin.
- IV injections especially in seizing animals are dangerous and need to be done by a vet. Also Magnesium if given too fast IV can cause fatal heart arrhythmias, so instead of having a go yourself, please call the vet.
- Seizing animals need veterinary attention immediately, as anti-seizure medication is required.
- Following recovery oral magnesium solutions like Moremag should be used to prevent relapses
- Cows with grass staggers take longer to recover than milk fever cases as magnesium takes longer to cross the barrier into the brain, so recumbent cows should be left sitting for at least a half hour after treatment.



### Prevention:

- Start magnesium supplementation at least 2-3 weeks before calving to give the gut time to adjust
- Magnesium is available in the form of oral drenches, pasture dusting, adding to supplementary feeds like maize or hay, water trough treatments and intraruminal boluses.
- Talk to your vet to determine if treatment is needed and which treatment would be most suitable for your situation.

## The birthing kit... what to do and when to call the vet!

Worried about your cow, ewe, doe, hembra (female alpaca) or dam when it comes to giving birth? No need to be, here are some hints on what to do when the time comes and when to call the vet.

### A normal birthing process:

If it's a lambing, calving, kidding or unpacking, the basic principles are the same.

Pre birthing you will often notice the udder bagging up and the vulva starting to appear floppy.

There are 3 stages of labour.

**Stage 1:** This is the preparation for birth. During the first stage, which can last from 3 hours in a cow or ewe to 4-6 hours in a first calving heifer, hogget or hembra, the ligaments of the pelvis relax and the cervix, vagina and vulva dilate. The dam becomes restless and often separates from the herd. She may stand with her tail lifted and back arched and have a few early attempts at straining. Stage 1 ends when the water bag, also called amniotic sac, appears at the vulva.



*A goat giving birth. The amniotic sac has appeared at the vulva, you can even see a foot appearing in the sac. This is the start of Stage 2.*

**Stage 2:** This is the actual birth of the newborn.

With a normal presentation the front feet should be visible in the bag and come out first, followed by a head tucked in between the legs, muzzle first. 95% of ruminant newborns are presented in this way.

Once the newborn has appeared at the vulva, progress should be quick and steady until it has been completely pushed out. Once half the newborn is in the birth canal the umbilicus becomes pinched and blood and oxygen supply from the dam is interrupted. This means the newborn relies on breathing for oxygen and if it isn't born



fast enough, may suffocate or drown in it's own fluids in the uterus.

<= *The kid has been born. The slippery bag-like thing behind the doe is the placenta.*

Once the newborn is on the ground, the dam should start licking it to remove membranes and fluid from the mouth and head. The newborn should take nice deep breaths and proceed to hold it's head up within minutes of birth, then attempt standing within about 10-15 minutes.



If the dam is not interested in the newborn, you need to step in and clear mucus and membranes away. If the newborn has large amounts of fluid in its mouth or sounds very gurgly when breathing, hold it up by the back legs for 1-2 minutes to assist in fluid draining out of the lungs.

DON'T swing it around though. Then start towel drying the newborn and consider giving a feed of colostrum within 2 hours of birth. Don't forget to disinfect the navel. Weigh a newborn cria to check that it is at least 6 kg at birth, lighter crias will require intensive care.

**Stage 3:** Expulsion of foetal membranes and uterine involution make up the last stage of labour. Usually the placenta is pushed out within a few hours of birth but can take longer. Call the vet if the dam is looking unwell, off her food or has very smelly membranes hanging out of her vulva.

#### **When to call the vet:**

- Stage 1 labour is lasting longer than 4-6 hours
- The amniotic sac (or water bag) has been out of the vulva for 60 min or longer without a baby following
- You notice an abnormal presentation, like 2 feet presenting without a head or a head without feet
- There is no progress of a visible baby in more than 15 minutes
- The uterus has been pushed out after the newborn, this is called a uterine prolapse and needs to be treated immediately by a vet.
- If you have any concerns or are unsure if birth is progressing normally
- If the dam is unable to rise following a prolonged birth or large newborn



## The birthing kit - what to have handy for a birth:

- A good strong torch, ideally a head torch so you have both hands free
  - A bucket of warm water with some safe disinfectant in it
  - Plastic gloves and lube if you are confident to have a go at helping with a birth yourself – have short and clean fingernails so the dam's insides aren't damaged
  - **The vets emergency phone number...**  
=> **LHVC 368 2891 or after hours 027 4444 332**
  - Towels to dry the new baby if the dam is not interested
  - A bottle of iodine or iodine spray to apply to the newborn's navel (reduces the risk of navel infections)
  - Some string to tie on the navel if bleeding and scissors if it needs cutting
  - Some frozen colostrum and a stomach tube or feeding bottle in case the newborn is not feeding off the mother - Colostrum from a newly calved cow can be stored frozen and warmed up for later calves (or lambs) that need a boost. Alternatively, frozen powdered colostrum suitable for all species is available at the clinic.
- Treatments for metabolic diseases (milk fever, grass staggers, ketosis) – if you are not sure about these, call the vet.



## Routine newborn care:

**Clip** – cut umbilicus if still attached to placenta or too long

**Dip** – dip umbilical cord in iodine

**Strip** – check each teat of the dam for good thick yellow colostrum

**Sip** – make sure each newborn gets a decent drink of colostrum within the first few hours after birth

## Caesarian section:

If the foetus is too large to be born or the position can't be corrected, a caesarian section may need to be done.

Warning, the following pictures contain blood and parental guidance is recommended...



<= Caesarians are mainly done standing under local anaesthesia in cattle. Here, the vet has made an incision into the abdomen and through the uterus and is in the process of pulling the calf's legs up to the incision.



<= The back legs of the calf are being pulled through the incision.

Most of the calf has been pulled out of the uterus =>



<= The calf is alive and well holding it's head up a few minutes after birth.



Once the calf has been removed, the placenta is pulled out and the uterus is sutured, then the 4 layers of muscle and skin are closed. =>



<= Both cow and calf are well. The calf proceeded to stand up within 10 minutes of the surgery being finished and is suckling well. You can see the suture line on the side of the cow, covered with purple spray. Postop pain relief and antibiotics are given routinely.

## Special offer for our WOFers:

For the months of May and June we have been offering farm calls at reduced rates for members of our Animal WOFs programme.

**As this has been so popular, we would like to extend this offer to you for any WOF farm calls in July and August.**

Use this as a great opportunity to get your stock vaccinated, foot trimmed, wormed etc. Sick animal visits are also included.

We can set up animal health programmes for your family of barnyard pets and discuss any products you are likely to need during the year. Coordinating farm calls with your neighbours can also make vet visits more affordable for you as mileage costs will be shared.

Also remember, any WOF farm calls from now until the end of October will go into the draw for this Ipad Touch.



Looking forward to see you at the clinic or at your place,

*Step of the team  
@ LHVC.*

Levin & Horowhenua Vets

518 Queen Street, Levin

Ph: 06 368 2891

Fax: 06 368 4003

Email: [animalwof@lhvc.co.nz](mailto:animalwof@lhvc.co.nz)