



**W**elcome to the August Animail from Tauranga Vets. This is always a busy time of year for our farming clients, many of whom find there aren't enough hours in the day to get through all the work. When you're not checking on your "springers" or rearing new calves, you're in the shed milking while at the same time trying to keep on top of your pasture management. It can be easy to overlook your animal health when you're under pressure but if you're faced with a cow that's having trouble calving, don't hesitate to contact our Large Animal Vet specialists. We can also visit to take bloods or samples from calves or your older stock for testing to identify early on the cause of any problems you may be experiencing. In this newsletter, we throw the spotlight on naval infections affecting calves and highlight what to do when you encounter a cow with a twisted uterus. We also want to get you thinking early about next season's reproduction targets.

## Navel infections



The term "Navel-ill" is commonly used to describe both local and systemic infections that are caused by infection of the stump of the umbilicus or navel between birth and the time it dries up. As vets, these infections can lead to serious diseases and the common ones we find are:

- Localised infections of the navel
- Umbilical abscesses
- Septic arthritis
- Meningitis
- Hypopyon (pus in the eye)

Navel infection occurs while the navel is still wet and often, many different bacterial species are involved. Factors that increase the risk of navel infection include:

- Calving in muddy paddocks
- Dirty, unhygienic conditions during pick up
- Failure to apply antiseptic/astringent solution to the calf's navel

- Housing calves in unhygienic conditions
- Calves that suckle each other's navels.

Any swelling or inflammation of the navel is serious. Localised infection can spread to the bladder, liver or abdomen via the blood vessel remnants in the navel. These calves usually present as lethargic, not wanting to drink and generally appear depressed. Umbilical abscesses are quite common and they usually require surgical drainage to resolve.

Septic arthritis is caused by the spread of bacteria from the navel through the bloodstream to distant joints in the calf's body and frequently, multiple joints are affected. Calves affected by septic arthritis show lameness and swelling of one or more joints. This is a serious infection as it usually results in permanent damage to the articular cartilage.

Meningitis symptoms are fever, depression, ataxia (wobbliness), hyperaesthesia (jumpiness), weakness and blindness.

No farmer wants their next generation of stock to develop these conditions but the good news is that they can easily be prevented. So when it comes to Navel-ill, consider taking these precautions when caring for your newborn calves.

- Calve down in clean dry paddocks
- Ensure calves are picked up regularly and transported in clean dry trailers.
- Ensure all calves get colostrum in the first 12-24 hrs.

- Spray umbilicus with alcohol based Iodine (eg Vetadine).
- Ensure all calves get colostrum in the first 12-24 hrs.
- House calves in clean dry conditions, change bedding regularly, do not over-crowd and ensure good ventilation.
- Use frustrators on calves that navel suck.

We generally treat Navel-ill by giving calves high doses of penicillin or cephalosporin. Surgical drainage of umbilical abscesses is also recommended.

Treatment of joint infection is possible but very expensive, time consuming and the prognosis is still guarded. High dose antibiotics and multiple drainage/lavage of the affected joints are usually required.

In summary, Navel-ill is a disease that can cause significant losses of calves. It is much better to try to prevent navel infection from happening in the first place than to treat it.

If you would like any advice or suspect your calves are showing signs of infection, please talk to our vets about the most appropriate treatment for you.

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## Twisted uterus



"Ring, ring," went the phone.

"I think I've got a twisted uterus. Could you please send a vet out to the farm?"

After establishing it was in fact a cow and not the client with a suspected twisted uterus, a vet was duly dispatched.

In this case and another soon after, the farmers' diagnoses were in fact correct.

The cows had been calving for some time without progress and after investigating, the farmers had found "something weird". When they put their hand in to find the calf they found the birth canal "tight" and they were unable to find the calf. Definitely time to call for assistance.

### A common problem

A twisted uterus (or torsion) is a relatively common cause of calving problems in cows, and makes up

about 10% of all calving problems. In these cases, the whole uterus containing the calf (and fluid and placenta) moves, with the pregnant horn of the uterus flipping over the non-pregnant horn. It can go either way, depending on what side the calf is in.

The torsion occurs soon after the calving process begins, probably due to vigorous movements of the calf at that time. There are some other factors which are thought to play a part:

- Larger bull calves are more susceptible
- The way cows get up and down – calf is "suspended" momentarily at the rear end of the abdomen
- Cows slipping, falling or being pushed around by other cows.
- Concentrate feeding which leads to a smaller rumen and more room in the abdomen for the calf to move.

### Calving a cow with a twisted uterus

In the cases discussed above, the attending vet was able to reach through the partially twisted birth canal to the calf and de-rotate the uterus. The calves were then able to be delivered with some traction. Because of the twist, the birth canal does not dilate normally so the final delivery of the calf

usually does require some effort.

If the twist is more complete, sometimes the calf can't be reached so we have to find some other way of untwisting the uterus. One method is to "plank" the cow, ie cast her onto one side, place a plank onto the abdomen with someone standing on it to hold the calf in place, and then quickly rolling the cow. If this doesn't work, surgery or a Caesarean operation will be required.

### Look for signs of discomfort in calving cows

Making things more difficult for farmers from the get-go is that a cow with a twisted uterus may not show obvious signs of calving. However she will show signs of discomfort or colic. Therefore any cow that doesn't look "right" should be examined by you or one of us.

If a torsion is missed, the calf will quickly die and the situation will only get worse. It may be impossible to correct the torsion and in that case, a salvage operation will be required, with a poor chance of success.

*It's much better to intervene too early than too late for the health of your animals and your bottom line.*

# Transition management



**Improved transition cow management has resulted in some of the most significant advances in dairy nutrition and production worldwide over the past 20 years. The “transition period” describes the time from four weeks before and after calving occurs, and is characterised by some significant metabolic changes in the body as well as an increased risk of disease.**

*The calving period demands a lot from your livestock and their nutritional needs need to be managed well in order to optimise your stock's performance. Getting it right provides a major opportunity to improve cow health, milk production and reproductive performance.*

Get it wrong and your stock can develop serious nutritional imbalances which puts them at risk of developing transition cow diseases. The most common diseases include:

- Milk fever (low calcium) and down cows
- Grass stager (low magnesium)
- Ketosis (energy imbalances)
- Udder oedema
- Abomasal displacements
- Retained membranes and uterine infections
- Poor fertility and production

The transition cow period has been well researched and it's not surprising to find that all these metabolic dysfunctions such as milk fever, ketosis and grass staggers are linked.

As a result of this understanding, the concept of transition feeding and management has evolved and developed into what can become a very technical process designed to optimise rumen function, calcium and bone metabolism, energy metabolism, protein metabolism and immune function.

We know that it makes sense to split your “high risk” springer and colostrum cows, eg “older cows” from the rest of the mob. That way it is possible to ensure they are meeting their nutritional requirements in that critical stage of pregnancy. It is also necessary to avoid calcium supplementation and high calcium-containing supplements, eg. Maize in the last 3-4 weeks before calving. This is because the cows need to activate and mobilise their own calcium stores pre-calving to cope with the sudden increase in demand for calcium as they start milking.

In contrast, colostrum cows may require calcium supplementation to meet the demands of early lactation. This is just one example of how nutritional requirements of springer and colostrum cows differ.

*If you would like any advice on how you might be able to better manage your transition period, please don't hesitate to contact one of our veterinarians.*

## CHECKLIST REMINDERS

### EDUCATE FARM STAFF ON:

- Mastitis cases – lactating cow treatment
- Downer cows – metabolic supplementation
- Calf scours and pneumonia
- Calving cows – when to call the vet
- Retained foetal membranes
- Continue magnesium supplementation
- Check herd trace mineral levels through blood testing
- Prepare for mating



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We hope you enjoyed this Tauranga, Te Puna, Katikati and Papamoa Village Vets newsletter.



## Pre Mating Repro Check



**It's all “hands on deck” with calving underway but it's important to spend time now thinking about next season's reproductive targets and getting those same cows back in-calf for future profitability.**

*For the New Zealand dairy industry, the national in-calf goal is to achieve at least a 78% 6 week in-calf rate (ICR). This is currently being achieved by the top 25% of farmers. The main drivers of 6 week ICR are the 3 week submission rate and conception rate and one way to improve this is by cleaning up cows with an infected uterus, aka those “dirty cows” in your herds.*

### Endometritis

“Dirty cows” have a condition called endometritis. This is when the lining of a cow's uterus becomes inflamed with the end result being pus is discharged into the vagina. You or staff may be alerted to a “dirty cow” when you notice their white vulval discharge at milking time.

Cows deemed “at risk” of developing endometritis have had dead calves, assisted calvings, retained afterbirth, milk fever, had twins, or they've been induced. It is now acknowledged that even cows with normal calvings and no metabolic disease can also develop endometritis. It's for this reason that a whole herd metricheck approach should be adopted to ensure these cows are not missed.

Failing to pick these cows up can adversely affect your in-calf rate and your herd's overall reproductive performance. New Zealand studies have shown that:

- Cows with endometritis have 10% to 20% higher empty rates
- If they do conceive, they are 2 to 3 weeks later in doing so

### Detection and treatment

Cows can be given a quick and practical check by using a metricheck device for evidence of infected vaginal discharge. Traditional advice was to check the “at risk” cows about 35 days prior to the planned start of mating. At this stage, up to 10% of a herd could be found with this condition. However, recent Australasian studies have shown that cows checked and treated between 14-28 days after calving respond better to treatment than those treated later.

Cows calved less than 14 days with vaginal discharge are not classified yet as “dirty” because flecks of pus in the discharge at this time may reflect normal involution. We recommend batch testing cows within the 14-28 day post-calving window as this appears to be the most effective approach. It treats cows earlier allowing them to get back to normal uterine health quicker, thus increasing their chances of getting back in-calf sooner.

In summary, recent Australasian research has shown that:

- Treatment of Metricheck positive cows early provides the most benefit.
- Improved reproductive performance is seen in cows that are examined within the first 2-3 weeks of calving, and treated within 2-4 weeks after calving.
- If investigation is delayed, cows with endometritis do not tend to “self-cure”. Instead they become impossible to diagnose.

*A proactive approach is recommended. Feel free to talk to one of our Large Animal Vets for more information on the best option to use for your herd and to make a metricheck booking.*