

farm news



Dealing with Down Cows

Emily Sycamore BVetMed MRCVS



It's always worrying when a cow goes down, but what exactly is the best thing to do in this situation and what are her chances of getting up again?

What are the main causes of down cows?

The main reasons we see for cows going down are post-calving nerve damage, back injuries and milk fever. If these issues can be prevented then the risks of the cow going down in the first place are greatly reduced.

Post-calving nerve damage often happens when a cow calves a calf too large for her pelvis, and the nerves around the birth canal become swollen or damaged. Preventing excessive pressure being put on a calf during calving can not only help to minimise this risk, but will also reduce the risk of tearing the cow – remember, a good caesarean is much better for the cow than a bad calving!

Back injuries (either from bulls or from other cows mounting) often happen during bulling. Providing a good, slip-free surface to all walking and loafing areas for cows is essential to help to prevent this.

Milk fever incidence can be much reduced through dietary management during the dry

and transition period (preferably), and/or by pre-emptive treatment with calcium boluses or injection for high risk cows at calving.

Whatever the reason the cow goes down in the first place, secondary muscle and nerve damage ('downer cow syndrome') soon sets in. Recent research has shown that around 84% of down cows end up having some degree of secondary damage, and only 14% of these animals make it back to their feet again. In contrast, 54% of cows with no secondary damage recover.

What to do when the cow goes down

The quicker the cow is identified as 'down' and treatment is commenced, the less chance there is of secondary damage occurring and the better the odds of her recovery. High quality nursing care and good welfare is essential – this involves ensuring that the cow is on a deep, clean, soft bed (preferably straw), has access to food and water (within her reach), is regularly (i.e. every 4-6 hours) turned from one side to the other, and is only lifted through safe and effective means.

If an animal is down due to injury, on-site casualty slaughter for human consumption may be an option. A vet needs to certify that the animal is fit for human consumption, and the Food Standards Agency specify that the certifying vet must be present at the time of slaughter.

Animals are eligible for on-farm slaughter if they meet certain criteria – e.g. that they have suffered an accident, the 'accident' is not a chronic condition, they are free from medicine withdrawals, they are otherwise fit and well and are showing no evidence of systemic disease, are in a state of reasonable cleanliness and that they have two ear tags and a passport. If an animal does not fit the criteria for a certificate, the vet will be unable to issue one. If an animal has been down for too long, it may well be condemned at the slaughter house due to extensive muscle damage.

Anti-inflammatory drugs can be immensely useful in providing pain relief for the down cow, and will help give her the best possible chance of getting up. Products containing ketoprofen often have a 24-hour meat withdrawal period and it can be a good idea to administer these if you are not sure whether the cow will get up but want to give her a chance – she can still be slaughtered the next day if she doesn't respond. If you're not sure of the diagnosis, though, always call the vet – no amount of anti-inflammatory drugs will fix a broken leg or replace a dislocated hip!

If you have any queries about a down cow or on-farm slaughter certificates, please call us on 01332 294929 to have a chat with one of our vets.



Upping the game on routine pain relief

Emily Sycamore BVetMed MRCVS



Recently you may have seen articles in the farming press encouraging the use of anti-inflammatory drugs as pain relievers for procedures such as castration and disbudding in calves.

This is something that, as a practice, Scarsdale Vets would strongly advocate. The campaign is supported by BCVA (British Cattle Veterinary Association) amongst other organisations.

Recent research by the University of Nottingham has shown that both vets' and farmers' willingness to use anti-inflammatories has increased over the past

ten years. This is partially due to perceptions of pain severity (related to procedures such as disbudding and castration) increasing, and partially due to the cost of analgesia being found to be within an acceptable range for farmers.

There are a number of benefits to be gained from using anti-inflammatory drugs when castrating or disbudding. These benefits include improved welfare and smaller checks in growth rates after the procedure (growth rate checks are often associated with pain, which in turn is associated with decreased feed intake).

There are a number of different anti-inflammatory drugs available for use in calves, with different products having different lengths of activity and different withdrawal periods. All anti-inflammatory drugs provide pain relief, will reduce inflammation and will help to bring down a high temperature.

Hello and goodbye to Emily...

Many of you will know that Emily Sycamore will be off on maternity leave from the beginning of December. We wish her all the very best for her impending arrival.

Emily Payne is providing maternity cover. We kept it easy for you by making sure we employed someone with the same name! 'New' Emily introduces herself below.

Hi all!

I have been working in Shropshire for four years since graduation from the University of Nottingham and have now moved to Scarsdale Vets to cover maternity for other Emily (not to be referred to as old Emily!). My interests inside of work lie in calf health and flock health planning. Outside of work, I enjoy walking my dog Magnus and can't wait to explore the Derbyshire countryside. I look forward to meeting and working with you all.



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