

## The Newborn Foal

### What should a newborn foal be doing?

Immediately following birth a neonatal foal is likely to remain recumbent at the back of the mare, possibly with the hindlimbs remaining within the vagina. The foal should quite quickly assume sternal recumbency and it is likely that the mare will stand at this point and the umbilicus will break.



Quiet observation is recommended at this point as disturbing the mare may cause her to stand quickly following birth which potentially could be detrimental to the foal. Observation from a safe distance to check the foal is breathing is all that is required at this time.

Following birth, an attempt to stand usually occurs fairly quickly, with time to standing occurring anywhere from around 15 minutes to 2.5 hours, the average somewhere around an hour. Assistance to stand should not be required and intervention is unnecessary. Shortly after standing the foal should exhibit seeking behaviour and a suckle reflex. Observing a foal try and find the mare's udder for the first time can be extremely frustrating to watch! The milk produced by the mare initially is called colostrum and is important in passing on immune protection to the foal because the foals own immune system has not developed yet. It is normal for a foal to have stood and suckled by the time it is around 4 hours old.

Following all this exertion, possibly not unsurprisingly, next on the list of things to do is have a well-deserved sleep!

### What should I be worried about?

A foal that remains recumbent with no attempt to stand or very poor attempt to stand is not normal. Standing with assistance is also not normal, even if once placed in a standing position the foal appears able to use its legs to walk.

Seeking behaviour for the udder but not suckling or continuous suckling at the mare's limbs or even the walls of the stable is not normal. A foal should be able to find the udder unassisted and suckle from it. If you are concerned because you have not seen the foal drink, check the mare's udder for signs you may have missed it. Is the udder leaking milk, does the udder appear full, do the teats have a shiny appearance indicating the foal may have been drinking recently? Does the foal have dried milk on its head, indicating it has been near the udder but not drinking?

Have you seen the foal urinate? First urination normally occurs around 6 hours after birth in colts and 11 hours after birth in fillies. A pattern of sleeping, waking and getting up to urinate and then having a drink before going back to sleep is normal for a newborn foal. So check what the foal is doing just after it gets up. Does the foal appear to be urinating from the correct place? Occasionally urine can leak from the umbilicus which is abnormal. After 24 hours the umbilicus should be dry, if it is wet, check to see if you can observe normal urination.



# Scarsdale Vets

## Equine

Excessive straining to pass faeces, possibly accompanied by colic type symptoms may be observed in neonatal foals. The first faeces passed by new born foals is called meconium and is an accumulation of waste products produced during their time *in utero*. This normally has the appearance of a very dark and often quite firm dropping which can be painful for the foal to pass. If the foal exhibits colic symptoms or repeatedly strains and nothing is passed this may indicate the foal is in difficulty. Sometimes administration of an enema by your vet is required to soften the meconium and help the foal.

Neonatal foals can often suffer with tendon problems, a result of having such long limbs squashed into a small space whilst *in utero*. A foal that is walking on its tip toes without placing the sole of the hoof to the ground or a foal with fetlock laxity causing it to walk with its fetlocks near or even touching the ground is not normal. Sometimes these problems correct themselves uneventfully with the aid of box rest but it is always best to get your vet to examine the foal.

Occasionally foals can be born with entropion (turning in of the eyelids). This is usually not serious, but left untreated the eyelashes irritate the surface of the eye globe and cause ulceration. Observe the foal for signs of ocular discomfort including partially closed eyelids, excessive tear production. If in doubt get your vet to come and check.

MKTG/Equine/Collateral/EquineInformation/The Newborn Foal



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