



# WENSUM VALLEY VETS NEWSLETTER

## Twin Lamb Disease (Pregnancy Toxaemia)

Twin Lamb Disease, also known as Pregnancy Toxaemia, remains one of the more common and preventable causes of ewe mortality in the final weeks of gestation, particularly in flocks with high numbers of multiple-bearing ewes. It can also affect goats.

### What is Twin Lamb Disease?

Twin Lamb Disease is a metabolic disorder caused by an energy deficit in pregnant ewes, most often during the last 2-4 weeks of gestation. As lambs grow in utero, they can take up to 60% of the ewe's abdominal space, reducing the rumen's capacity and making it physically harder for her to consume enough feed - especially bulky forage.

The growing demands of one or more developing lambs, combined with reduced feed intake, push the ewe into negative energy balance. Her body begins to break down fat reserves to make up the shortfall, leading to ketone body accumulation in the bloodstream - a state known as ketosis.

If left unchecked, this condition progresses rapidly and often ends in death.

### Which animals are most likely to be affected?

- Those carrying twins or triplets
- Older ewes
- Over or under conditioned animals
- Animals under stress, especially during adverse weather
- Ewes with concurrent issues (e.g., lameness, poor teeth, or illness)
- Flocks on poor-quality forage or unbalanced nutrition



Twin Lamb Disease can appear gradually or progress rapidly. Early detection is key.

### The early signs include:

- Loss of appetite
- Dullness or depression
- Reluctance to move, slow to rise
- Isolating from the flock
- Staggering

Without treatment, death can occur within 3–5 days from onset.

### As the disease progresses signs include:

- Apparent blindness
- Muscle tremors or twitching
- Head pressing or circling
- Teeth grinding, frothing at the mouth
- Recumbency and coma

## Prevention – Nutrition is Everything

Preventing energy deficiency is the single most important step. Good management in the final trimester can reduce the risk of Pregnancy Toxaemia, this includes:

- Body condition scoring (BCS) – aiming for a BCS of 2.5–3 at lambing, as thin or fat ewes are both at risk and may need individual care
- Pregnancy scanning – use scanning to determine lamb number and group ewes accordingly, so you can tailor feed levels
- Targeted nutrition – consider high-quality silage, concentrates, and mineral supplementation close to lambing
- Avoid stress – minimise handling, transport, and environmental stressors (e.g. overcrowding)
- Monitor intake – make sure dominant ewes don't monopolise feed - use long troughs or feed barriers
- Supplement vulnerable ewes – provide propylene glycol orally to high-risk individuals as a preventative measure in the last few weeks

## Treatment – Act Fast

Once signs appear, treatment must be prompt as the prognosis is poor if treatment is delayed beyond the point of recumbency. Contact us on 01328 864444 for veterinary advice and treatment. This can involve oral propylene glycol (60–90 ml, twice daily for 3 days) – acts as a rapid energy source, or in severe cases IV glucose/dextrose treatments. Anti-inflammatories (such as metacam) may help reduce associated inflammation and improve comfort, especially in recumbency ewes. Sometimes inducing lambing with corticosteroids can save the ewe, but this depends on the stage of gestation and condition of the lambs so is assessed on a case by case basis. Recovery is possible, but ewes that survive often have poor mothering ability or milk supply as a result of the illness. Therefore, prevention is far more effective than treatment.

If you're concerned about Twin Lamb Disease in your flock please call us on 01328 864444 so discuss your problems with a vet.

