

LAMENESS

A lame cow is one that has a functional problem with one or more legs. Lameness causes weight and production loss. A lame cow does not eat enough because she spends extra time lying down, or standing in one place.

Lameness may be due to trauma and/or infection in one or more legs. Watch cow walking to see which foot/leg she is lame in. If the leg is dangling, held very stiffly or swollen above the fetlock, then you may be looking at a leg injury. There are a huge number of things that can cause lameness including leg and back injuries and less obvious causes such as mastitis. However, if there is no obvious cause, check the foot first as 90% of lameness's are due to a foot condition!

First you need to watch the cow walking to identify which foot (feet) she is lame in.

EXAMINATION OF THE FOOT

Do not guess the cause, carry out a routine examination.

1. Observe walking - look at abnormalities (swelling).
2. Lift up foot and secure tightly.
3. Clean all dirt off foot.
4. Is there swelling above the hoof or on the heels? One heel more than other? Feel.
5. Is there anything between the hooves? Feel!
6. Do the feet have a "rotten" smell?
7. Are there any obvious cuts/holes on skin or hoof?
8. Are there any stones or nails stuck in the hoof?

NEXT, START TO PARE THE HOOF

9. Scrape off the white line!!, look for black marks, blood staining, stones.
10. Trim toes and any overgrown horn (foot length is 7cm).
11. Follow black marks on sole until they disappear (not black horn!).
12. Can use hoof testers to guide you to the painful area.
13. If find a penetration of sole, pare right out until you reach healthy tissue. **Try not to make it bleed.**

There may be pus. Leave a very **shallow, cup like hole, not a deep narrow hole**. A deep hole will just trap more dirt and cause more lameness.

14. If a large area of the soft sole is exposed, use a cowslip on good hoof.
15. If swollen around the coronet and fetlock, will need antibiotics. Remember to mark and record the cow for antibiotic withholding.
16. If there is nothing in the foot and the bulbs of the heel are swollen, with the two claws pushed apart, this is probably foot rot. Run your fingers between the claws, and smell them – foot rot has its own distinctive smell! Treat these with three days of penicillin.
17. If there is an abscess involving the joint, you should seek veterinary advice. These infections are deep seated and need intensive treatment to cure them.
18. If you can't see anything and the cow continues to be lame, call your vet!

WHEN TO CALL YOUR VET

- Any lameness that continues for more than two days without improvement
- Any joint swelling, or swelling of leg above hoof
- Anything you are unsure about

CARE OF LAME COWS

Foot lesions are very painful. The lame cow needs rest from standing, walking and jostling by other cows. Milk once a day at the start or at the end of milking. Keep in a paddock next to the shed, and do not mix with the rest of the herd. If you put a cow back into the herd too early, she will damage the soft healing tissue and become lame again. The least time spent on concrete, the better!

CAUSES OF LAMENESS

- Impatience of the herds person
 - Hurrying cows down tracks.
 - Dogs, motor bikes.
 - Excessive pressure of backing gates
- Poorly maintained races
 - New race with sharp metal
 - Dirty concrete yards, eg. small stones
 - Muddy areas, eg. gateways, water troughs
- Other factors
 - Yard and shed design
 - Races that obstruct cow flow
 - Heifers with soft feet
 - Yarding cows on concrete over winter

PREVENTION OF LAMENESS

1. Allow cows to walk at their natural pace.
2. Race maintenance.
3. Clean concrete yards.
4. Drain metal gateways and water troughs.
5. Correct nutrition and trace element supplementation.
6. Use of copper sulphate/zinc sulphate as a footbath or on footmat.