

# MILK FEVER

## Cause

A sudden fall of Calcium levels in the blood due to the cow being unable to meet the increased demands of late pregnancy, parturition, colostrum and early lactation.

## Occurrence

Usually in older cattle (>7yrs), normally associated with calving, but can occur at other times, depending on weather, feeding, supplementation and diet. Jersey cows are at higher risk as they have fewer calcium absorption sites in the gut.

**Symptoms:** Vary depending on stage.

- Stage 1: Dopey or excited  
Stiff legged, wobbly.
- Stage 2: Sit down, dry muzzle, constipated  
Kink in neck. (*S-bend—see picture*)
- Stage 3: Over on side, bloated  
Dead within 10 hours.



## Treatment

Sit cow up to avoid vomiting.

Administer Calcium solution into vein if possible, or under the skin over the ribs. If possible warm solution first.

In the Vein lasts 1-2 hours. Under the skin lasts 4-6 hours. Oral treatments last 12 hours.

When cow is alert and swallowing, give an oral calcium + magnesium drench or starter drench.

If not calved, check to determine if needs assistance (common in these cases)

Check for other problems like mastitis, RFM's, Ketosis.

If a cow does not respond to treatment within an hour then you should call a vet. The longer a cow is down the lower the survival rate. A down cow ends up squashing the muscles of her legs. The muscle cells start to die and this can lead to kidney failure.

Hip lifters used correctly can be life saving. Sometimes a cow that has just gone down with milk fever is not quite strong enough to get up by herself, but with a little help can be up and away. Never leave a cow unattended in hip lifters, and do not have a cow in them for more than 5 minutes at a time.

## After Care

Remember, a cow with milk fever probably hasn't eaten for a day or so but she still has the same energy requirements of a milking cow.

Dose with ketol (250mls) twice daily or 1L starter drench.

Inject 10mls of B12 under the skin to stimulate the appetite.

Remove calf from cow.

If the cow is up it is better to milk her out to prevent mastitis.

Put a cover on her. Feed hay if possible, allow ad-lib access to feed.

## Prevention

Fit not fat cows pre-calving.

Magnesium supplementation reduces incidence of milk fever by stimulating calcium mobilisation within the cow.

Add calcium (limeflour) to the diet of colostrum cows and milkers. Dust pasture at rates of 150-200 grams/cow/day.

Fed hay to springers.

Problem cows can be injected with Vitamin D, 3 - 7 days prior to calving.