

PRACTICAL SPRING TIPS

Milk Fever: If you are getting lots of down cows then it is worth talking to your vet to see if they can help identify the cause. Metabolic troubles may be due to problems with magnesium supplementation, lack of calcium, ketosis, or something else like a dietary imbalance.

Remember, a cow with milk fever probably hasn't eaten for a day or so but she still has the same energy requirements AS a milking cow. Treat down cows with calcium and energy (dextrose) in the vein. If you can't find a vein at least give her calcium (but not dextrose!) under the skin. Follow up with an energy drench (e.g. MPG) and an oral calcium product once the cow can swallow. Oral calcium keeps blood calcium levels up for 12 hours—a bag under the skin lasts only 3 or 4. Don't use products including dextrose (eg Glucalpos, Glucalmax) under the skin—the calcium is absorbed slower and you are more likely to get abscesses.

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 who 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.

Prolapsed Uterus: This is an emergency! Call us immediately. Usually it happens in a cow with milk fever—the uterus can't contract up and so it falls out the backend. Sometimes it will happen when a cow has a big calf and the uterus is exhausted. If the cow is down try to keep them down to limit the damage to the uterus. Don't give calcium in the vein unless they are flat out and at risk of dying. If possible, wrap the uterus with wet towels or sheets to keep it clean and wet until the vet arrives.

Retained Cleanings/Uterine Infection: If the cow is not sick, write her number on the "at risk cow list" and do nothing for at least a week after calving. "Tincture of Time" is the best treatment. If she appears to be sick then she may need treatment with antibiotics. A temperature over 39.5 C usually indicates that the infection is affecting the cow. Do not put pessaries into the uterus if the membranes are still attached. Cows that have had retained membranes should be treated with a uterine antibiotic to help clear up infections. This will improve her chances of getting back in calf early.

At Risk Cows: Start making a list of any cow that has problems around calving is at risk of developing an infection in the uterus. A cow with a dirty uterus won't get in calf, but may cycle normally. At risk cows include any cow that has:

- § Retained her cleanings
- § Difficult or assisted calving
- § Dead calf or slipped
- § Pus discharge from the vulva

Often there are no visible signs in these cows and many can be left undetected and not treated until too late. Get cows on the list checked by your vet well before mating. If 'dirty' we can irrigate with an antibiotic that has no milk withholding. This can be

done at any stage after the uterus returns to its normal size – usually 2 weeks after calving.

Calvings: A cow should calve within 2 hours of starting to strain. If she is making no progress, you need to intervene. Sometimes a cow will start to calve but not get to the straining stage. This is common with breech births or a twisted uterus. If a cow is uncomfortable e.g. getting up and down a lot, separated from the group but doesn't go on to calve, then it is worth checking to see if she has a problem—otherwise you might end up with a rotten calving in a couple of days time! If you've calved her yourself remember to always check for damage or a twin. It is a good idea to give oxytocin immediately after an assisted calving to help her get rid of the calving membranes. Cows with twins require extra energy for the first few days after calving. Keep them with colostrums cows until they are eating normally and have adequate rumen size and function.

Calving Paralysis: Results from damage done to the nerves in the pelvis by large calves getting stuck, or rough and prolonged deliveries. Anti-inflammatory injections immediately after a difficult calving can make a big difference to the cows chance of recovery. Anti-inflammatory drugs won't be effective if these cows have damaged muscles from being down for long periods. Cows who are knuckling over may need a splint. This enables her to get up and walk around unaided until fully recovered.

Heifers with Swollen Udders: When a heifer calves the blood supply to the udder increases dramatically. Often though the veins and lymph vessels have not had time to enlarge to drain all this blood away from the udder. This is what causes the swelling, basically it is fluid in the skin. Try to milk her out thoroughly, oxytocin (milk letdown hormone) helps with this. Severe cases may need a diuretic (makes her pee out fluid) and/or anti-inflammatory to take down the swelling.