

# WINGHAM & VALLEY VETS

Newsletter

August 2017

Volume 5

## *Nursing Care of Downer Cows*

A 'downer cow' is a cow that is unable to stand for more than 24 hours. There are many causes of downer cow syndrome including calving paralysis, milk fever, injuries and mastitis. To give a downer cow the best chance of recovery it is essential to determine what has caused the cow to go down, treat that condition and then continue to nurse the cow during recovery. If adequate nursing care can't be provided, euthanasia should be considered.

Good nursing care and treating the initial cause are vital to the recovery of downer cows.

Downer cows should be considered an emergency when dull, depressed or non-responsive and you should contact the vet ASAP as the cause may be life threatening (e.g. milk fever or grass tetany).



**Figure 1: Cow is suspended by a cow sling - these are preferable to hip clamps as they are more comfortable for the cow and so can be used for longer periods**

When we attend downer cows we assess them carefully for signs of 'secondary complications' of having been down. These complications can occur quite quickly, hence the importance of instituting good nursing care as soon as possible. Pressure damage to the cow's hamstring muscles from lying down is one of the major and potentially life-threatening complications and it causes the release of a muscle enzyme (CPK). If this muscle enzyme is above a

critical threshold, recovery is highly unlikely (<5%) and we will usually recommend euthanasia in the interests of the welfare of the cow. Importantly, research has shown that appropriate nursing care significantly reduces the damage to these muscles and thus greatly improves the chance of recovery. Even with an accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment for the disease that caused the cow to go down in the first place, the chance of recovery is substantially reduced without dedicated and adequate nursing care.

## *Cases of the Month*

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Waterbelly calf (Hydrops Amnion)  
Sole Abscess (horses)  
Pregnancy Toxaemia (ketosis)  
Cow Caesareans  
Woody tongue  
Milk fever  
Choke (horses)  
Ruptured Splenic Mass  
Pancreatitis  
Bladder stones

## *Run Dates*

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Krambach: every Tuesday  
Oxley Island: fourth Thursday of every month  
Thurs 24<sup>th</sup> August  
Thurs 28<sup>th</sup> September  
Coopernook, Lansdowne & Hannam Vale: third Thursday of every month  
Thurs 17<sup>th</sup> August  
Thurs 21<sup>st</sup> September

To book a job, please call us by 5pm the day before a run.

Emergencies will be accommodated.

We are considering offering a Comboyne run – please call us to register your interest.

**6557 0000**

## *Upcoming Events*

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Cattle Lameness Workshop coming soon!

*In the spotlight:  
August is Pet Dental Month!*

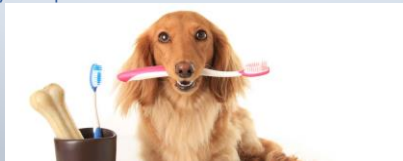
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Throughout the month of August we are offering free dental checks for all pets. The major signs of dental disease are bad breath, discoloured teeth, reddened gums and/or difficulty eating.



**Figure 2: Grade 4 (severe) periodontal disease in a dog**

Some dogs and cats with dental problems will also have an aversion to firm foods (e.g. dry biscuits), because it hurts to chew. If your pet is showing any of the above signs, we recommend a complimentary dental check to ensure their mouth is healthy. Dental disease can have a major impact on an animal's general health and wellbeing - gum disease causes chronic discomfort and can lead to heart and kidney problems. If you are unsure whether your pet's mouth is healthy, we would recommend a dental check because by the time bad breath and pain when eating become obvious, dental disease is often severe. At your appointment, we will also give advice on maintaining your pets' teeth at home.



### The key factors of good nursing care are:

**Adequate bedding** – clean, dry, **deep** (minimum 300-400mm) and soft (e.g. straw, hay, uncompacted sawdust)

**Shelter** – cold reduces bloodflow to the extremities

**Rolling and Lifting** – rolling should be frequent (7-8 times daily) – it reduces pressure on the muscles and improves blood flow; lifting can be helpful but only if the cow can support some of her own weight (see our tips on lifting downer cows on page 3).

**Confinement** – cows that drag themselves around

### *Case Report: Pregnancy Toxaemia (Ketosis)*

Michael recently saw a case of pregnancy toxaemia (or ketosis) in a beef heifer. This disease can occur in over-conditioned pregnant cattle in their last month or two of pregnancy, after a sudden decrease in nutrient intake (usually because feed is short or due to a drop in appetite secondary to illness) just as the developing calf is demanding the most nutrients from the cow. If the cow can't meet this demand for energy from the calf, she will mobilise her own fat stores, producing 'ketone bodies' – these chemicals in the blood make the cow feel sick, and cause the symptoms of ketosis. Heifers are more commonly affected than older cows. Ketosis can also result from a deliberate attempt by producers to reduce body condition, by switching to a low-nutrient ration, to try and enhance calving ease. **Ketosis is prevented by ensuring pregnant stock have sufficient, high quality feed**

**in the last 8 weeks before calving and by preventing pregnant stock from becoming overfat.** Ketosis can occur as a single case but it is also seen in outbreak form, where losses of up to 10% of the breeding herd have been reported. In its early stages, the signs are mild – the cow will stop eating and appear dull or depressed and she may isolate herself from the herd. This progresses to weakness, and she may go down - if down for more than 24 hours, they will usually die. The other form of ketosis is 'nervous ketosis' and it is more common in cows very close to calving. They may be unsteady on their feet, aggressive, restless and reluctant to enter the yards. Some cattle may appear blind or show strange behaviour – e.g. licking constantly at the ground or their own coat. Without treatment, death is likely. The heifer Michael saw was less than a month away from calving, previously very fat but now looked tucked up in the abdomen as if her rumen was empty, unsteady on her feet and unusually aggressive and hyper-responsive to being handled. Recognising nervous ketosis, Michael immediately administered emergency treatment to restore energy balance. This also included a steroid injection to bring calving on sooner. Most cases of ketosis require intravenous glucose, and a medicine called propylene glycol to provide a rich source of energy for the cow. Within 48 hours of treatment the heifer had a healthy calf at foot and was eating happily and behaving normally - a great outcome all round!

trying to get up can damage their nerves or their hips. Restrict downer cows to a small pen so that they remain on appropriate bedding and don't injure themselves further.

### **Adequate Food & water.**

**Milking** – down cows are at risk of mastitis if they aren't milked twice daily with an appropriate teat disinfectant applied.

**Anti-inflammatories** can aid in reducing swelling and secondary damage, however they are no substitute for excellent nursing care. Many of these down cows are well worth the considerable effort of nursing them and we believe many more of these cows can be saved with persistence and dedication to nursing care.

### Lifting Downer Cows:

- The cow should be supervised the entire time she is lifted.
- Don't leave cows hanging by the hips – this will not help them recover and will likely damage them further.
- Belly bands under the chest help distribute the cow's weight and improve comfort
- If a cow cannot support her own weight or stops supporting her weight with her front legs, gently lower her to the ground and focus on rolling her to each side every 2-3 hours.

### Johnes Beef Assurance Score

After our last newsletter we had some queries from clients about the J-BAS system as there was still some confusion as to what a producer's score will be, should they opt to do nothing (i.e. no biosecurity plan). We have included a table below transcribed from the Animal Health Australia website, which explains the different levels of J-BAS score, and what producers are required to do to reach a certain level. For producers with no history of JD on their property, they can retain a score of 6 by having a documented on-farm biosecurity plan (which doesn't have to be overseen by a Veterinarian). Producers who do not have a biosecurity plan, will revert to a score of 0. A score of 7 or 8 will require a Vet to oversee your biosecurity plan, as well as triennial check testing.

JOHNES BEEF ASSURANCE SCORE (J-BAS)				
ON-FARM BIOSECURITY PLAN IMPLEMENTED AND DOCUMENTED	BIOSECURITY PLAN IMPLEMENTED FOR MINIMUM OF 5 YEARS	TESTING + VETERINARY ADVISOR FOR THE PLAN	Two successive negative sample tests 2 years apart and ongoing triennial check test	8 High assurance
			One negative sample test a minimum of 5 years after the last confirmed clinical case (or if no history of the disease) and ongoing triennial check test	7 Assurance
			No history of JD on the property or minimum 5 years since last clinical case confirmed on the property	6 Managed disease risk
			If previously infected: minimum of 2 years of biosecurity plan implemented and since last clinical case of JD confirmed on property, plus all high-risk animals identified and removed If no previous infection: biosecurity plan in place for 2 years	4 Progressing
			Biosecurity plan in place Clinical case(s) removed	2 First steps
				Suspect, infected and unknown

**Table 1: Explains J-BAS system (extrapolated from table provided on Animal Health Australia website)**

### Anxiety in Dogs: a calm dog is a happy dog!

Generalised anxiety disorders are common in many pet dogs and sadly, behavioural problems are one of the major reasons dogs are euthanased or surrendered to shelters. Many problem behaviours such as excessive barking, separation anxiety, phobias, destructive tendencies and dog aggression may be manifestations of an underlying anxiety disorder. If you have a dog that you feel is badly behaved, there is probably a good chance he or she is anxious. We see hundreds of dogs every year with anxiety disorders and many of these dogs can be helped significantly with a combination of medication and behavioural therapy. We find that, although many owners are desperate to help their beloved pet and are struggling with the aftermath of destructive behaviours, it is common for some owners to be resistant to the idea of medicating their dog with



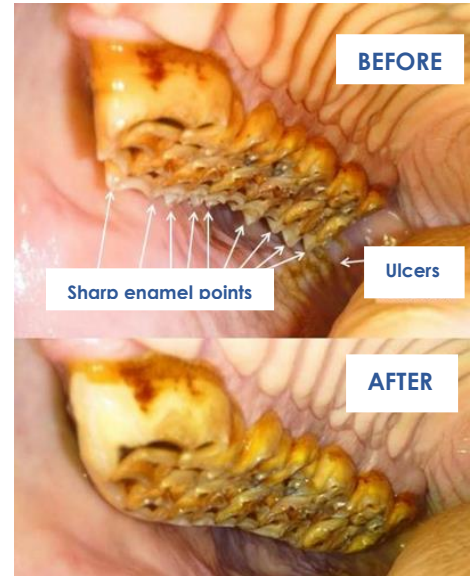
'antidepressants' as they are hopeful that the problem can be solved through discipline. Discipline won't treat generalised anxiety and owners need to understand that their dog's problem needs to be treated more like a mental illness. Although behavioural medication can be lifelong, in many instances it doesn't have to be when started early in the anxious dog's life, during their formative years, as it helps them to learn to be less anxious and feel more comfortable in the world. We would encourage anyone who has an anxious dog or a dog with problem behaviours to talk to Louise and our qualified trainers, and to maintain an open mind about drug therapy for anxiety – when used appropriately, it really can improve the welfare of so many of these dogs (and their owners!)



## Equine dentistry directly impacts horse health

We have recently seen some cases of 'choke' in horses with dental disease. 'Choke' is when the oesophagus (the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach after swallowing) becomes blocked with feed material. Dental disease can cause discomfort each time a horse chews, meaning the horse may avoid chewing their food sufficiently - an oesophageal impaction (blockage) can result. Initially, signs of dental disease may not be obvious - it is only once the dental disease becomes quite severe that symptoms such as weight loss and dropping of food from the mouth become apparent. Horses with long-term dental disease will have difficulty maintaining their bodyweight.

*Equine dentistry is a cornerstone of horse healthcare - it is essential that you have your horse's teeth checked regularly by your equine veterinarian as many horses with severe dental disease may not show obvious symptoms*



John, Pete and Michael have a special interest in equine dentistry and are fully qualified to undertake routine and corrective equine dentistry. Your horse should have a dental exam if they have any of these symptoms: weight loss, dropping feed, drooling, slow or abnormal chewing, head tossing, bit resistance, nasal discharge, bad breath or changes in manure (cow-pat appearance or hard faecal balls with long strands of undigested fibrous feed matter).

We can perform equine dentals on-farm in our mobile crush or you can bring your horse to our equine facility to save on travel costs.

### **Free Trace Element Testing still available!**

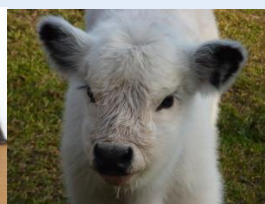
Many of our beef and dairy clients have been getting extremely useful information from the free Selenium, Copper and Cobalamin assays. This fully subsidised trace element testing is still available so if you are having growth or fertility problems in your herd, please contact the clinic to arrange herd testing - testing is free, you will only pay travel and Vet time to collect the samples.

## Companion Animal, Equine & Cattle Services

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