



FACTSHEET

Laminitis

Laminitis is an extremely painful condition and can be fatal so it is vital that all horse owners are aware of the causes and the symptoms as prompt treatment may save the horse or pony's life.

Laminitis can affect any/all of the feet but is more often seen in the front feet than the hind ones. Any horse or pony can be affected by laminitis.

The Causes

Overweight animals or those that have had laminitis before are much more prone to the disease: Others will become affected from the following causes:

1. High intake of sugars and starch which cause an overload in the digestive system. Undigested sugars and starch are pushed through to the hind gut where bacteria break down the undigested material causing acidity. This acidity kills the bacteria that digest fibre releasing toxins which enter the blood stream and cause a disruption of blood flow and if this occurs in the feet, laminitis is the result.
2. Stress such as a change of environment and/or travelling frequently can cause the onset of laminitis. Mares are particularly prone just after foaling as a result of the additional physical stress.
3. Severe infection such as retained placenta in the mare, severe colic or prolonged diarrhoea.
4. Obesity - weight gain should be controlled. (See 'Right Weight' handout).
5. Concussion laminitis is a result of hard, fast work on a hard surface such as the road.
6. Cushings disease (see our other handouts for this condition).
7. Equine Metabolic Syndrome. This is a condition similar to diabetes in man and is especially common in native breeds. The horses metabolism is programmed to store every calorie it can from the feed, rather than burn it off (this helps ponies to survive harsh winters in their native environments). We can test for this and a treatment (Metformin) is now available for use in conjunction with a strict diet.

Symptoms

Acute laminitis: the symptoms come on very suddenly and are severe. The horse will not be able to move comfortably and will have raised digital pulses in the foot. It may also adopt a different stance in an attempt to reduce the excruciating pressure on its front feet.

Chronic laminitis: generally seen as a result of a relapse from previous attacks. Growth rings will be seen in the hoof walls and the heel will often grow faster than the toe with a widening of the white line. The horse will be 'footy' and avoid turning in tight circles/hard going in the early stages.

Treatment

1. Call the vet immediately if symptoms of laminitis are seen.
2. Move the animal to a stable littered with a very deep bed of shavings, peat or sand.
3. Remove any feed but make sure water is always available. The vet will design a diet plan for your horse as he/she must still have food to eat to avoid the risk of hyperlipaemia.
4. X-rays may be recommended by your vet to see if any rotation of the pedal bone has occurred.
5. Remedial farriery may be necessary and your farrier will trim the foot under veterinary supervision.

Prevention

1. Owners must monitor diets very carefully. Feed little and often. Monitor weight weekly using a weigh tape. We have electronic scales available at the surgery and run 'weight clinics' to assist owners with dieting their horses.
2. Avoid feeding cereal mixes and molassed products.
3. Horses and ponies on a diet to **positively lose weight** should receive 1.25 – 1.5% of their body weight in food – **including** any grass and hay intake! ie a 400kg pony should receive 5-6kg of food in total per day.
4. Restrict grass intake by strip grazing and using a grazing muzzle.
5. Do not turn out onto frosted grass.
6. A good exercise routine is proven to reduce the risk of laminitis substantially.
7. Regular farriery ensures the foot is in the best condition to prevent laminitis.
8. Check digital pulses daily so you will know immediately if laminitis occurs.
9. Check your horses crest – remove from grass if it becomes hard and leave indoors until it has softened again.

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