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Downer Cow Syndrome

A “Downer Cow” is defined as a cow which remains in sternal recumbency; sitting up on its brisket with legs tucked underneath, for unknown reasons.

The causes of downer cow syndrome include

- Trauma - leg fractures, hip dislocation, pelvic fractures.
- Metabolic disease - ketosis, milk fever.
- Neurological problems - calving paralysis, sciatic nerve paralysis.
- Toxic infections - septic metritis, acute E.coli mastitis.



Initial assessment

It is essential to examine any downer cow thoroughly at the outset to avoid unrewarding nursing input and to prevent unnecessary suffering and treatment costs.

Under current legislation any cow suffering an accidental injury within the previous 24 hours, and passing an on farm veterinary inspection, can be slaughtered on farm and then presented at the abattoir for meat inspection.

Any casualty animal needs to be slaughtered on the day of veterinary examination. Sargeant's of Bramshall and Redfern's of Buxton will both accept casualty animals.

Significant damage to the muscles of the hindquarters can occur within six hours of going down so it is important to make a decision as soon as possible as to whether nursing is to be attempted.

Poor candidates for nursing success include cows that:

- Have done the splits and have one or both legs at right angles to body.
- Have their hind legs extended behind them or have both their hind feet touching their elbows.
- Have been down on concrete for a long time.
- Don't attempt to rise at all or only attempt to rise using their forelimbs.
- Have had a calf stuck part way out for a long period of time.
- Want to lie on their side despite propping with bales etc.

Lifting and Moving Downer cows

There are various ways of lifting and moving downer cows including loader buckets, nets and hip clamps (Bagshaw hoist).

A dairy farmer from Yorkshire has developed a humane, robust sling made from a rubber mat which is lifted up by galvanised handles using pallet forks on a loader.



It is called the Easy Cow Lift and details can be found at www.easycowlift.com

An electrolyte solution from XL Vets - XL-Lytes

XLVets have produced an electrolyte solution, XL-Lytes, similar to Energaid, Lectade etc. to be used for the treatment of calf scour.



It is supplied in a plastic bucket containing 24 sachets with each sachet mixed with 2 litres of water. Once diluted it can also be mixed with milk replacer to form a stable electrolyte solution.

XL-Lytes is very competitively priced at £1.57 ex VAT, and can be supplied individually or in a bucket of 24 sachets.

XL-Lytes will replace Lectade Plus which sells at £3.19 ex VAT and Energaid at £3.36 ex VAT.