

Laminitis
ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE
Information Sheet WS059/07
Christopher Day - Veterinary Surgeon

Copyright © 2007 AVMC
Chinham House, Stanford in the Vale, Oxon SN7 8NQ UK
01367 710324
This is a page from www.alternativevet.org

LAMINITIS

What is it?

This is a problem suffered mainly by native ponies but also less commonly by horses, which can cause them a great deal of pain and distress. When affected, they become variably sore, in all four feet or mostly in the front feet. The degree of pain can range from a mild 'stiffness' in movement, with difficulty turning on a hard surface, to extreme pain, mimicking colic. All degrees between exist. The affected animal will tend to ease feet in turn when standing and will often choose the option of lying down, to relieve discomfort. Worse cases will refuse to move. In extreme or repetitive cases, the pedal bone can move inside the foot, presenting a challenge for rehabilitation.

It is characterised by heat in the feet, obvious signs of pain, unwillingness to move and a characteristic backward-leaning posture, shifting the weight from the front feet.

Affected ponies can have an enlarged crest (an early-warning sign) and will often show a pronounced pulse in the lower limbs.

How does it occur?

The condition is usually triggered by excessive access to rich spring grass (a far cry from moorland grazing) but can occur at any time in the grazing season. We have even seen it occur in the winter, presumably from cold stress in the feet (akin to frostbite). Injury and concussion of the feet can be a cause, as can over-enthusiastic hot-shoeing. It is rare in larger horses but has been seen as a result of steroid (cortisone) treatment, ingestion of nettles sprayed with herbicide (including even so-called livestock-safe ones) and the application of artificial nitrogen to the pasture, during or before turn-out.

Laminitis - AVMC

Over-feeding is a common ingredient in causality. Sadly, 'show condition' often demands an artificially plump shape, bringing susceptible ponies into danger. The condition may be caused by a sudden change in bowel flora populations, rather in the way that clostridial diseases affect sheep. It can also arise through metritis (womb infection), liver disease, respiratory infection, shock, Cushing's Syndrome or chronically overgrown feet.

Are there preventive measures to take?

It is wise to restrict access to grass, for susceptible ponies. Artificial nitrogen fertilisers should **never** be used in horse or pony pastures, or in hay fields. We have even witnessed problems from wind-drifted fertiliser. None of the changes in grass, brought about by nitrogen application, are beneficial to horses and most are frankly harmful. We explain the main aspects of this to clients. Weed killers (herbicides) are ALWAYS dangerous, whatever it says on the label. This is especially true when nettles start to wilt after treatment and are then eaten. Ponies should be kept slim. No 'hard feed' should be given and sugars (e.g. molasses) are definitely to be avoided. Some of the so-called 'laminitis-recommended' commercial foods surprisingly contain molasses, which, in our opinion, renders them highly **unsuitable**. Sadly, sponsorship deals and advertising contracts can take the place of best practice. While it is understandable to keep ponies on 'bare' paddocks, any grass that does grow is under 'stress' and high in non-structural carbohydrates (sugars), rendering it a danger.

Is it responsive to treatment?

The conventional response to this disease is to use anti-inflammatory agents (NSAID). Acepromazine is also used, in some cases, to dilate blood vessels. These drugs can sometimes reduce symptoms in the short term. Expert witness testimony in a recent court case suggested 1 in 30 cases actually recover, by these methods.

Using natural medicine methods, especially [homeopathy](#), [acupuncture](#) and [herbs](#), we aim to cure the disease or at least to reduce the tendency. [Diet work](#) is also vital, since bowel function has a massive effect on metabolism and health. At the **AVMC**, we have succeeded in the vast majority of cases. This is sometimes only by satisfactorily 'controlling' the problem, not 'curing' it, but a cure is possible in some cases. A homeopathic prescription is chosen on the basis of constitutional features, since this is a chronic disease, and there may be a need for symptom-based homeopathic prescribing in support. Acupuncture can be very helpful for acute severe cases, to bring rapid pain relief at the outset of treatment.

Laminitis - AVMC

Common homeopathic remedies, that have worked in past cases, chosen according to signs in the individual patient, are *Aconitum*, *Bryonia*, *Belladonna*, *Hypericum*, *Natrum muriaticum*, *Nux vomica*, *Phosphorus*, *Pulsatilla*.

Chronic laminitis

Ponies who have suffered repeated attacks, or a single severe attack, can show foot deformities (including rotated or dropped pedal bones). At the **AVMC**, we aim to restore a near-original hoof shape and structure, over a period of time. The situation is rarely hopeless and efforts should always be made to restore correct shape and function. Sometimes, the methods that are most suitable appear to be counter-intuitive, but the rewards make the effort worthwhile in most cases. It is certainly not good to accept a worsening foot shape, albeit disguised by heavy 'dumping' of the toe, since this will eventually lead to disaster. We are always happy to discuss this important aspect with the farriers who attend our patients.

The outlook

The horse world tends to be very pessimistic about laminitis but the outlook does not have to be bad, in all but a very few cases. While lifestyle and welfare can be poor during the early stages, restoration of more normal grazing capability and exercise tolerance can bring back a healthy and happy lifestyle.

N.B.: Founder is a term used in the UK to imply dropping of the pedal bone. In the USA, it tends to imply any form of laminitis.

To return to the web site of the AVMC, click the 'BACK' button of your browser or click www.alternativevet.org

This site is subject to frequent ongoing development and expansion - please revisit to view new material