

Laminitis Factsheet

Update April 2020



Laminitis is a common, painful and potentially devastating condition affecting the hooves, that can lead to long term crippling lameness.

Laminitis is an emergency and prompt veterinary treatment and appropriate management are essential to reduce long term effects. Laminitis means inflammation (“itis”) of the laminae. The delicate laminae structures in the feet become inflamed and the bond between the sensitive laminae (pedal bone side) to the insensitive laminae (hoof side) is damaged. This is extremely painful. There are many reasons why this may occur and this is a very active area of current equine research to understand the disease process involved.

Clinical Signs

In early “acute stage” cases, the horse or pony may appear 'pottery', especially when turned tightly or walking on hard ground. It is most commonly seen in the forelimbs but can also occur in the hindlimbs or all 4 feet. Laminitic horses often stand with a characteristic stance, their hindlimbs supporting all the weight as they rock back on their heels to take the weight off the painful laminae at the toes. The affected feet will feel warm and there will be bounding digital pulses palpable in the lower limbs. If all four feet are affected, the horse/pony may spend long periods of time lying down. More severe cases will be very reluctant to move and unable to bear any weight on their affected limbs.

Chronic laminitis often have an altered foot shape and 'laminitic rings' can be seen on the hoof wall. It can result in continuous low grade lameness, and in very severe cases, sloughing of the hoof wall or prolapse of the pedal bone through the sole.

What causes Laminitis?

Endocrine associated laminitis: this is an extremely active area of current research. Both Equine metabolic syndrome (EMS) and Pituitary pars intermedia dysfunction (PPID/Equine Cushing's disease) are causes.

- EMS commonly affects obese horses with excess fat storage (although not always) and insulin resistance. This causes elevated insulin levels in the blood, which can cause laminitis. This can be diagnosed with a fasted blood sample or an in feed glucose test. This condition is best managed with diet and exercise. Occasionally, certain drugs may be required too. Please call one of our vets to advise you on management of this condition.
- PPID is most commonly seen in older horses and ponies. It is due to an enlargement of a part of the pituitary gland at the base of the brain. This causes the release of higher levels of certain hormones, including ACTH, which can lead to laminitis. A blood test can be taken to diagnose this condition. Treatment involves daily tablet medication, in conjunction with management changes.

Other causes of laminitis include:

- Endotoxaemia associated laminitis, which can occur secondary to serious conditions such as colic and retained foetal membranes.
- Supporting limb laminitis can occur due to excessive weight bearing, generally when a horse is suffering from a severe lameness on the opposite limb.

Treatment

If your horse/pony is showing signs of laminitis, it is imperative that you act quickly and contact your vet immediately. Your vet will probably advise a visit to assess the pony and prescribe painkillers. Mild cases can be treated with box rest on a deep bed of shavings, anti-inflammatories, and occasionally a mild sedative (ACP) to encourage them to remain calm, lay down and rest. The provision of a deep shavings bed (with no area of the stable bare) and complete box rest, minimizing movement, may reduce the chance of the pedal bone rotating and sinking occurring. Frog supports can be very beneficial in the acute stage, both for comfort and to further support the pedal bone.



Bearsted Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 5LH
office@newnhamcourtequine.co.uk
T:01622 734 884

Laminitis Factsheet

Update April 2020



More severe cases may require radiographs of the feet and remedial farriery, in conjunction with your farrier, as well as a prolonged course of anti-inflammatories and box rest. In cases where the pedal bone has penetrated the sole, the prognosis is generally hopeless, and euthanasia is required on humane grounds.

Based on the large number of cases of acute pasture-associated laminitis having an endocrine (hormonal) cause, it is now commonplace for the vet to advise testing your horse or pony for EMS and PPID. This is important as there is no point treating laminitis if the underlying cause is not addressed.



Sinking and rotation of the pedal bone



Bearsted Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 5LH
office@newnhamcourtequine.co.uk
T:01622 734 884