

Precalving Down Cows

The heavily pregnant dry cow has a rapidly increasing requirement for energy because of rapid foetal growth. The fetus and placenta can use up to 30% of the cow's total energy requirement. At the same time as the calf is rapidly growing and consuming more space in the abdomen the cow has a decline in Dry Matter Intake (DMI). Cows carrying twins have an even lower DMI. The cow may be faced with an energy crisis and go down. This can occur suddenly although the condition usually develops over a number of weeks. Conversion of body fat to energy occurs in the liver and so by the time the cows are down there may be secondary liver changes. This condition is referred to as *Pregnancy Toxaemia or Ketosis*.

An accurate diagnosis of this problem should be made by a vet. Treatment includes giving Dextron pouches to provide energy and usually inducing the cow to calve. The drug used to induce calving is a steroid that also aids energy metabolism. Prompt treatment is essential to increase cow survival. These cows will not necessarily get up as soon as treatment has been provided. They need to be provided with good quality food, shelter, an oral glucose supplement (Ceton) and may need lifting. Be aware that calving may need assistance.

Prevention is the key to this disease. Appropriate nutrition throughout late lactation and the dry period is important. This means evaluating cow body condition score on a regular basis, allocating feed accordingly and being flexible with your rations. The quality or nutritive value of the feed is also important. Be alert to those cows looking dopey or lagging behind the others when moved.

Other causes of dry cows going down include injury, milk fever, infections or simply being cast. Determining the cause of dry cows being down can be difficult. If unsure and before beginning any treatment please feel free to speak to a vet.