

Swiftsure Equine Veterinary Services

Dr. Danica Olenick, DVM, Dr. Kaitlin McDonald, DVM & Dr. Reina Fennell, DVM

Managing Acute Laminitis

Pain Control:

- Following examination, your veterinarian will be able to prescribe the most suitable pain control for your horse. This will likely include a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) such as Bute, Banamine, or Previcox. Administration of these medications as prescribed is essential not only for pain but also to help break the cycle of inflammation in your horse's hooves while minimizing potential side effects.
- Additional pain control or anti-inflammatory medications may be added depending on the severity of your horse's laminitic episodes.

Cryotherapy:

- Continuous ice therapy applied to your horse's hooves is the most effective way to decrease inflammation. This can be performed by applying tough bags (e.g. paddling dry bags) around your horse's hooves and lower limbs and filling them with ice. Small holes should be cut in the bottom of the bags to allow drainage as the water melts and prevent warm water baths from developing. The ice should be replaced as soon as possible after melting.

Rest:

- Every step taken puts stress on the laminae in your horse's feet. It is essential that movement is limited by confining your horse to a stall or small paddock (12' x 12'). Shelter should be provided. Food and water should be easily accessible to minimize the amount your horse has to walk.
- If your horse is stressed in a stall, providing a close by mate, a slow-feeder hay net, or adding anti-anxiety medications at your veterinarian's direction may help to minimize movement.
- Your horse should be provided a deeply bedded area with dry, clean shavings or other soft bedding to act as a cushion for their feet and give them a place to lay down.

Hoof Support:

- Your farrier and veterinarian will come up with a long-term hoof support program for your horse based on the radiographs obtained to assess for rotation, sole depth, and other hoof abnormalities.
- In the short-term, major changes to your horse's hooves through trimming are generally contraindicated as they can further the inflammatory cycle. Instead, your horse should be provided hoof support in the form of foam pads (firm pink insulation foam pads changed daily) or Soft Ride boots (can be obtained from Canadian Forge & Farriery). No matter the support used, your horse's hooves should be picked out daily and assessed for boot rubs, sole bruising, abscess development, or any other concerns.

Diet:

- Laminitis is secondary to hyperinsulinemia when caused by diet or endocrine diseases such as Equine Metabolic Syndrome and Cushing's disease. As such, dietary management to decrease simple sugar intake and minimize insulin peaks is essential.

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- Your horse should ideally be on a low sugar hay. This can be determined by assessing the hay analysis and looking for a hay with <10% NSC. If a hay analysis can not be obtained, the hay should be soaked for 20-60 minutes prior to feeding to help decrease the NSC. Once soaking has finished, be sure to dispose of the wastewater away from where any horses have access to it.
- The total dry matter intake (DMI) for an overweight horse with laminitis should be 1.5% of body weight (e.g. 15lbs for a 1000lb horse). If your horse is overweight, they should not receive anything other than a low NSC hay at 1.5% DMI and a ration balancer (e.g. Dr. Reed's) to ensure adequate vitamin & mineral intake.

Laminitis can be progressive and severe. As such, it is essential to recognize the signs early and manage their care closely. Please stay in close contact with your veterinarian and reach out if any concerns are noted including worsening lameness, laying down more than usual, heat in the hooves, bruising on the soles, abscess development, lethargy, inappetence, decreased manure production, loose manure, or any other concerns.