



Vet Steve Borsberry, from the Solihull-based 608 vet group, part of the XLVet Group, in the West Midlands, shares some tips on disease prevention and tackling health problems in dairy herds, drawing from his many years of on-farm experience. Here he takes a closer look at an all-too-common summer problem for many herds.

Depressed appetites and listless cows could be the result of heat stress

Hot and bothered

Kee a close eye on your cows as temperatures soar this summer. Heat stress is much more common than producers think – hardly surprising when temperatures inside buildings can be up to 10°C higher than outside temperatures.

Typical symptoms to look out for included quickened breathing, depressed appetite and listlessness. Cows will eat less – the primary strategy for lowering body heat production is for a cow to reduce its feed intake – and they also tend to stand around more and look miserable.

Take a look at cows when they're tightly stocked in the collecting yard during the summer and see if you can spot the signs.

Heat stress impacts on cow reproduction – it can be difficult to get cows in calf because they don't cycle if they're too hot for prolonged periods. Lactating animals start showing signs of heat stress when temperatures hit around 20°C, but performance – in terms of milk yield and reproduction can start to be affected at just 15°C. Cows are happiest between 5°C and 15°C.

In the most severe cases, which are classed as heat stroke rather than heat stress, cows can collapse and die. But this is relatively rare.

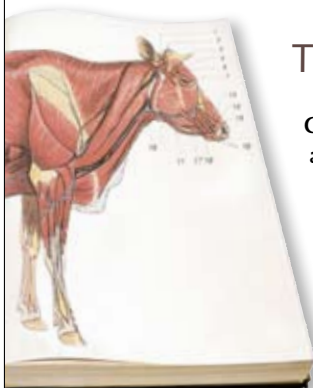
Heat stress isn't rare though and although you can't treat the cow's symptoms, you can change the temperature of her environment and tackle the problem.

Good ventilation and air movement will reduce cow house temperatures, so open-sided barns and open roof ridges are ideal – anything that gets a good through draft of fresh and cool air. Fans are another way to cool cows, but these should be combined with good ventilation.

Misters at the feed fence are common place on dairy units in countries such as the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia. These wet the cows while they eat and then the fans are turned on. The combination of water and air movement really helps to cool the cows down and misting at the feed fence keeps the water away from the bedded cubicles areas.

And, just as vitally, plenty of water, freely available, is needed. There has to be lots of it and free access.

Water and shade is also essential for cows that are out grazing and over crowding in collecting areas should also be avoided.



The encyclopaedia **Heat stress**

Causes: High temperatures in cow buildings and when out at grass with no shade.

Symptoms appear and performance is effected at just 15°C, but more typically at around 20°C.

Symptoms: Fast breathing or panting, depressed appetite, a reduction in milk yield and reproductive performance.

Cows also appear listless and miserable.

Prevention and treatment: Ensure that cow buildings are well ventilated with good air flow. Install fans where problems persist.

Don't over stock collecting areas – crowding increases risk of heat stress.

It's vital to ensure that cows have access to plenty of water at all times, both indoors and out. And make sure that there's some shade when cows are outside.