



Vet Steve Borsberry, from Warwickshire-based 608 Farm Vets (a member of the XLVet Group), 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 the problem of dense objects – such as wire – in the reticulum.

Tacks and nails are just some of the culprits behind 'puncture' problem

Hardware heartache

Wire, and heavy or dense objects that are accidentally swallowed by cows, will get caught in the reticulum – or the first stomach. Objects can include boluses and once in the reticulum they tend to stay there.

All may seem fine, until just after calving, when cows with wire in their reticulum may start to show clinical signs of a problem.

The bad news is that the reticulum is close to the heart – just 20mm away – and a cow straining to calve can sometimes exert enough pressure to push a wire through the reticulum wall and into the heart, the lungs or the liver.

Welding rods, nails, roofing tacks and bits of old tyre are just some of the objects that have been found inside the reticulum and can cause serious life-threatening injuries – sometimes sudden death. Even sharp splinters of wood can cause problems, but these tend to be less dense and pass through the cow's digestive tract.

Typical symptoms or signs include peritonitis and weight loss. Both can be treated with a magnet, which should be placed in the reticulum with a bolus gun. This is usually enough to pull the wire out of harms way, particularly if it's just a partial puncture.

But it's not easy to diagnose. Tell-tale signs include an arched back, grunting, and pain when the rumen contracts. If you think you may have a problem, try administering a magnet.



The encyclopaedia **Traumatic reticuloperitonitis (Hardware disease)**

Cause

Most typically wire in the reticulum, but can also be caused by other heavy (dense) objects, such as nails. Exertion by the cow can push the object through the reticulum wall and it can pierce vital organs.

Symptoms

Most severe cases can result in sudden death. Peritonitis and weight loss are other symptoms and cows will show signs of pain and discomfort, including back arching and grunting.

Diagnosis

Difficult to spot unless you've

seen it before. A process of elimination is required. If producers can't see any other reason for the above symptoms, it's a condition to consider and worth administering a magnet to see if that offers the cow some relief.

Prevention

Keep silage pits and feed storage areas and passageways tidy and free of 'dangerous' objects. Degrading tyres on silage pits are the major culprit on UK dairy units. Magnets may also be given routinely at drying off as a precaution.

Treatment

Again, magnets can help if there's a known problem on a unit. But seek the advice and help of your vet if you think you have a cow with a wire. An operation may be required.

