

Dairy vet Piers Pepperell, from Somerset-based Mount Vets Farm Practice (part of the XL Vet Group) takes a look at the cause of uterine prolapse and what can be done to treat and prevent it.

Optimising body condition score is key to preventing uterine prolapse

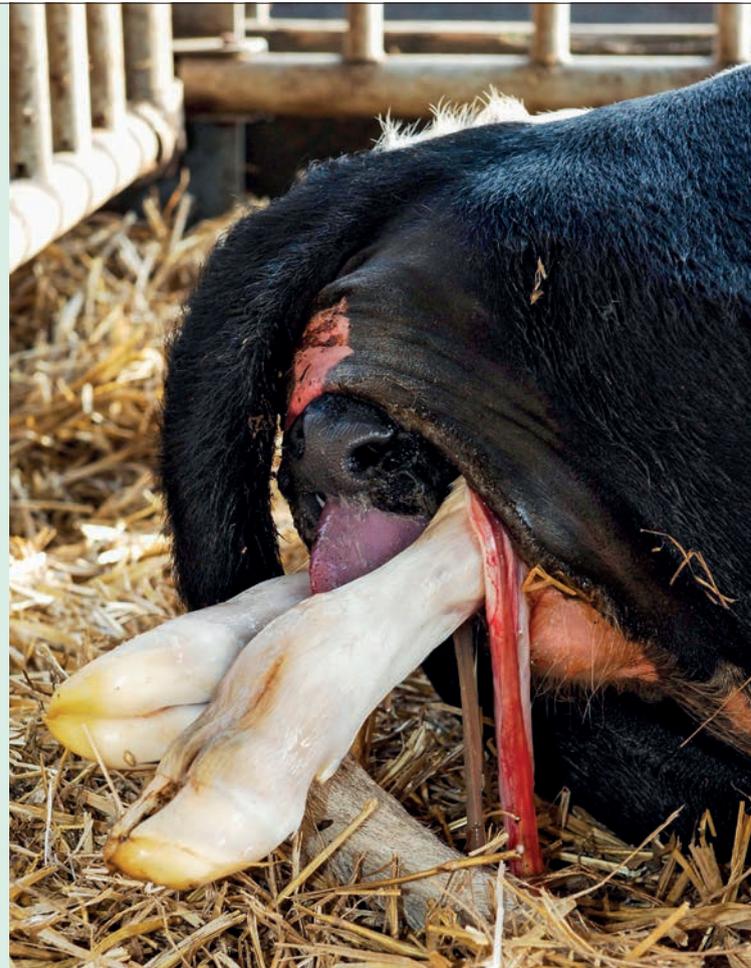
Avoid 'fat' and 'thin' cows

Uterine prolapse only occurs after calving and is typically the result of cows being too fat. If the cow's body condition score is too high at calving, excessive fat in and around the pelvis and birth canal can mean that there's less space for the calf. This can result in a difficult calving and cause excessive bruising and irritation.

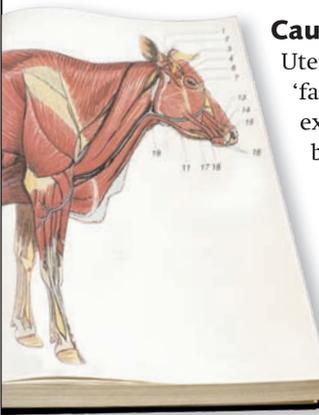
It's this irritation that causes the real problem because it stimulates the cow to keep pushing, even when the calf has been born. As a result, she can push out her uterus.

It's a particular problem in cows and heifers with a BCS of 4.5 or more, so it's vital to keep BCS at an optimum during the dry period. But cows that are excessively thin, with a lower than optimum BCS, can also suffer from this condition. They too can have a difficult calving due to a sheer lack of muscle strength along with a weakness in the ligaments that holds everything in place. However, most cases in the UK are seen in 'fat' cows.

Treatment must be prompt. Uterine prolapse is an emergency; not due to the risk of infection but because the cow is at risk of hypothermia and damage to the exposed uterine tissue. Once outside the body, the cow will work hard to keep the uterus at body temperature. Because it is very large after calving it loses a lot of heat very quickly. In addition to this, just the sheer weight – between 25kg and 20kg – could cause a tear in the artery leading to the uterus. So if you see it, act quickly. Remove the afterbirth, cover the uterus with a clean towel, or similar, to protect it and keep it warm, and call the vet. Keep the cow still and, if she's on her feet, keep her standing. This will make replacing it that much easier.



The encyclopaedia **Uterine prolapse**



Causes

Uterine prolapse is typically seen in 'fat' cows post calving and caused by excessive 'pushing', stimulated by bruising and damage to the birth canal during a difficult calving. Can also be seen, occasionally, in cows that are too thin at calving.

Treatment

Speed is key. Keep the cow still and the uterus warm and clean. Vet will wash the

uterus and administer an epidural before manually manipulating the uterus back into place. Pain relief should then be administered. This reduces the irritation caused by the difficult calving and blocks the urge to strain and then push the uterus back out. Oxytocin is also given, to help the uterus to contract. On-going TLC plus a bottle of calcium is recommended, as this can also aid muscle contraction.

Prevention

Dry cow management is key. Ensure that cows don't get too fat, or are too thin, during the dry period. Aim for a body condition score of 3 to 3.5 at calving.