



Cattle vet Richard Knight, from the Cumbria-based XL Vets Westmorland Veterinary Group, takes a closer look at a common cause of difficult calving on units throughout the UK. Here he tells us how to recognise a twisted uterus and explains how it can happen and why it's vital to treat the condition quickly and correctly.

Recognise the signs and act promptly

## A twist of fate

**U**terine torsion (twisted uterus) is a cause of dystocia – or difficult calvings – and it's certainly the most common calving problem that we get called out to. In the 18 years that I've been at this dairy-based practice, every other assisted calving that I'm called out to will be the result of uterine torsion.

If a producer has had one or two cases before, they'll often recognise what it is before I arrive. A twisted uterus is relatively easy to diagnose, once you know what to look for.

A cow will walk around with her tail head up in the air, looking like she's going to calve. The 'Ferguson reflex', which prompts the cow to start pushing, won't be triggered until the calf is in her pelvis. And it can't move up into the pelvis if the uterus is twisted.

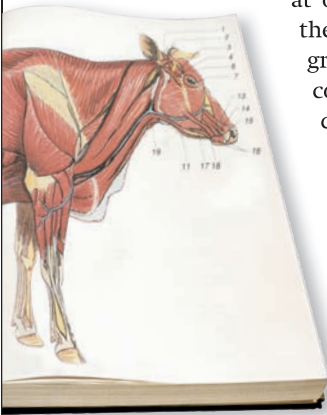
If the uterus has been twisted for several hours, the cow may also look unwell. The 'torsion' occurs at the neck of the uterus – between the vulva and the cervix. So the vagina is constricted. A typical 180° torsion will result in the calf being upside down or, if the twist is through 360°, the calf will be the right way up. Either way, it can't make an appearance without intervention. Correcting a twist or torsion can be quite straightforward, if you know what you're doing. It's certainly something that a producer can learn to do, with hands-on training from a vet. I prefer to be called out because, although it's relatively simple, if it's not done correctly then it can cause a lot of damage. Producers can check for a uterine torsion if they clean the vulva and use a clean and gloved hand, and use a lubricant. They won't hurt the cow or introduce infection. But they could, if they detect a problem early on and call the vet, save her life and the life of the calf. In a 360° torsion the blood supply to the calf can be compromised, with fatal consequences. We regularly get calves out alive but time is crucial, so keep an eye on any dry cows that are due to calve and look out for those raised tails.



### The encyclopaedia **Uterine torsion**

#### **Cause**

The uterus – including the calf and all the contents – twists at or just before calving. This can be the result of moving cows to a new group. Bullying from a dominant cow can do it. Poor rumen fill and compromised dry-cow management can also increase the likelihood of the condition.



#### **Symptoms**

A cow that's close to calving and has a twisted uterus will be off her feed, restless and will hold her tail head up. She looks like she's going to calve,

but doesn't. If she's been like that for several hours, she may also look unwell.

#### **Diagnosis**

An internal examination will reveal a 'closed' vagina, caused by the torsion at the neck of the uterus.

#### **Treatment**

Manual manipulation by the vet can be used to twist the uterus and calf back to their 'normal' position.

#### **Prevention**

Good dry cow management is vital. It's essential to minimise stress and sudden movements that may cause the unborn calf to twist the uterus. Good rumen fill can help here too, acting as a support and keeping the uterus in place.