

Laminitis in horses

treatment and management

what is laminitis?

Laminitis is a common, painful and potentially disastrous condition of the horse's foot whereby there is a severe inflammatory process in the sensitive laminae of the hoof. These laminae are the structures which maintain the integrity of the foot and which bind the pedal bone to the hoof capsule.

When these laminae become inflamed in laminitis, they suffer from a decrease in blood supply, causing them to die back. This dying back of the laminae means that they are no longer capable of maintaining the pedal bone in its normal position. The combined weight of the horse, and the pull of the deep digital flexor tendon which inserts onto the pedal bone, causes the pedal bone to rotate. In very acute cases the inflammation may be so dramatic that all the laminae are compromised to such an extent that the entire pedal bone sinks downwards into the hoof capsule.

This whole process is extremely painful and often career ending, and so immediate veterinary attention is required.

clinical Signs

- reluctance to move, with a leaning back stance
- shifting weight on front legs
- retained placenta
- increased digital pulses
- heat in the feet
- reluctance to pick up feet

causes:

obesity

- increases susceptibility
 - more weight on sore hooves
- 'full' fat cells likely linked to insulin resistance.



carbohydrate overload

- overfeeding of grain
- lush pastures

Typically, spring is the 'danger' period, when legumes and grasses are loaded with soluble sugars during active growing periods



Illness

- gastrointestinal problems
- toxemia
- Cushing's disease
- non weight-bearing lameness
- retained placenta



treatment and management:

immediate support

Stabilise the pedal bone and control pain.

- rest
- pain relief
- anti-inflammatories
- hoof support (including sand to stand on)



dietary management

Fat is not healthy - overfeeding is dangerous.

- remove from fresh pasture
- high fibre, low sugar diet
- weight loss
- long-term exercise program



hoof management

Management is a life-long commitment.

- corrective trimming
- x-rays may be necessary
- regular hoof maintenance



Remember, laminitis is extremely common and very painful. If you suspect your horse of having feet problems, call the team at Cox St Vets for advice and treatment options.

