

# Milk fever

Milk fever is a disease that all dairy farmers have some awareness and it is now being realised that sub-clinical hypocalcaemia may exert far reaching effects by predisposing to reproductive disorders and ketosis.

## **Cause**

Milk fever is a disease caused by low blood calcium (hypocalcaemia), and is characterised by general muscular weakness, circulatory collapse, terminal coma, and death.

## **Predisposing factors**

- The condition is found mostly in cows at calving or within 3-4 days after calving in high producing cows.
- Cold wet conditions increase the incidence.
- Cows heavily fed before calving are more susceptible.
- The frequency increases as the age of the cow increases.

## **Signs of the disease**

- In the early stages, there are periods of excitement, and the cow has stiff legs and a staggery gait.
- The cow then goes into sternal recumbency, becomes drowsy and unable to rise.
- The head is turned back onto the flank and the cow has a dry muzzle.
- The cow is constipated.
- Untreated, the cow goes into lateral recumbency, become bloated and often dies.

## **Diagnosis**

By symptoms or response to treatment.

## **Treatment**

- Prompt treatment is essential.
- Calcium borogluconate injection either slowly intravenously or subcutaneously.
- Rapid intravenous infusion may lead to cardiac arrest so a combination of intravenous and subcutaneous injections is useful.
- Underdosing is often a cause of relapse.
- Be aware that the milk fever may be secondary to some other condition that has reduced the intake of the cow.

## **Prevention**

- Restrict calcium supplementation during late pregnancy for susceptible animals and cows with a history of milk fever.
- Change to a high calcium diet after calving.
- Avoid calving cows in overfat condition.
- Vitamin D injection 2-8 days precalving may help.

Source: Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; 2009