

## LAMINITIS

Laminitis is a disease that strikes fear into the hearts of horse owners the world over. At this time of the year, when at last the grass begins to grow, it is the season to be extra vigilant.

Laminitis is literally “inflammation of the laminae”, the laminae being the interlocking layers that join the inside of the horny hoof capsule to the outside of the live tissues of the foot. This layer physically suspends the weight of the horse off the ground and is vital for normal hoof function. When the laminae become inflamed in an attack of laminitis, the joint between hoof and foot swells and loosens, and becomes very painful. This can be followed by anatomical changes such as rotation and sinking of the pedal bone within the hoof, or even shedding of the entire hoof.

### **Evidently laminitis is best avoided, so what causes the condition?**

There are in fact many causes, including toxic colic, concussion and some infections, but by far the most common cause is exposure to rich grazing, especially if there is a sudden change in the diet. There are many factors that increase the risk of laminitis actually occurring: at this time in the spring the grass grows in spurts due to the warm days and frosty nights. This results in the build-up of complex sugars called fructans that are not easily digested by horses and can cause bacterial “blooms” in the intestine that then release toxins into the blood. The exact mechanisms of how this leads to laminar damage are complicated and still poorly understood.

The risks are increased by the horse/pony being overweight. There are two main reasons for this: the first is physics – the heavier the load on the laminae the more stress they are under. The second is that the metabolism of overweight ponies changes and they become “insulin resistant”. The upshot of this is that they are more vulnerable to increases in sugar intake in the diet.

### **So how can we avoid this scourge?**

There are a few measures we can take to head off an attack of laminitis. These are especially important if your horse has a history of previous bouts of the condition, and also if you have a native breed pony that is prone to getting fat.

#### **1. Grazing management**

Do not allow your horse/pony unlimited access to spring grass, particularly when there are frosty nights and warm days. It is better to limit the area of grazing, rather than limit the time of exposure. This avoids peaks and troughs of sugar intake.



## **2. Do not allow your horse/pony to get too fat**

Try to slim them down in the winter as it is nearly impossible to get a pony to lose weight in the spring and summer.

## **3. Exercise**

Try to work your horse/pony regularly to keep him fit. Not only will this help with weight control, but will also keep his metabolism on the boil and less likely to become insulin resistant.

## **4. Foot care**

Keep the hooves regularly trimmed, regardless of whether the pony is shod or not. Overgrown feet put more strain on the laminae and increase the risk of an attack.

If you are concerned about laminitis and would like to speak to a vet please phone Isle Valley Equine Clinic on 01460 66099. The best time to phone is between 8am and 9am. After that the vets are likely to be out on their calls but messages will always be taken and the vets will phone you back as soon as possible.

