

Laminitis

Laminitis is an extremely painful condition of horses, ponies and donkeys, where the laminae of the hoof become inflamed. There are various risk factors for a horse getting laminitis, and it can be a fatal condition.

Symptoms

The classical symptoms of laminitis are:

- Heat in affected hooves
- Increased digital pulses of affected feet
- Reluctance to walk
- Lameness in one/multiple feet
- 'Rocking back' appearance on feet
- Lying down more than normal

Risk factors/causes

1. Obesity/rich feed
 - The most common cause of laminitis seen. It more commonly affects ponies more than horses, and ponies kept as pets
2. Concussion
 - Repeated hard work on solid surfaces causing inflammation and tearing of the laminae
 - If the horse has been lame on another foot, they in turn put more strain on the contralateral limb
3. Secondary to a hormonal disease
 - With Cushing's disease there is increased circulating steroid in the body, which predisposes to laminitis
 - In Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS) the pony has a degree of insulin resistance. The body then produces more as it has had no response, and this increase in insulin can lead to laminitis
4. Toxaemia
 - Severe infections which travel in the bloodstream of the affected animal
5. Drug induced
 - Steroid treatment can rarely cause laminitis
6. Stress
 - Any stressful situation can raise the circulating steroid in the body

Diagnosis

Most of the time a diagnosis can be made by observing the symptoms described above. If the horse has suffered repeat bouts of laminitis, shows very severe symptoms or does not respond to treatment, an x-ray of the foot will be recommended.

When the foot is x-rayed the vet will assess the angle of the pedal bone compared to the hoof wall to assess for any rotation or sinking. If the pedal bone has undergone any of these changes, the prognosis is worse.

Treatment

Your horse will be started on painkillers straight away, as it is an extremely painful condition. Your vet may give an injection straight into your horse's blood stream while there, and then leave you oral powder/paste to continue. Your horse will need to be box rested on a deep soft bed – the softer underfoot, the more comfortable for them to stand on. Frog supports can be bandaged to the underside of the hooves for extra support. Sometimes special horse shoes may be required to be put on by your farrier.

Any rich feed should be stopped, reducing sugar and starch ingestion.

If the horse is unwell, leading to toxemia, the underlying cause will be treated.

Prevention

- Avoid sudden changes to the diet
- Avoid rich feed/pasture
- Avoid obesity
- Avoid hard work on solid ground

Prognosis

With mild cases, if caught early and appropriate management instigated soon, the prognosis is good. With severe episodes which involve sinking of the pedal bone, unfortunately the prognosis is guarded/grave.

Once a horse has had one episode of laminitis, they will be prone to repeat episodes in the future, and with each episode, more pathology will occur in the foot.