Milk fever in ewes

Usually milk fever occurs in ewes (usually older ewes) in late pregnancy. The predisposing factors include high calcium requirement in late pregnancy and low dietary intake. A heavily pregnant ewe can't absorb enough calcium in the diet to meet her requirements and those of the growing foetus/es. She will use calcium stored in her skeleton to try and meet those needs. The amount she uses depends on the diet she is on.

Lush, fast growing pasture, grains and concentrates tend to be low in calcium.

Under drought conditions, ewes fed grain or concentrates containing low calcium may become calcium deficient. Under wet conditions and rapid pasture growth, the calcium may be at its lowest. Sheep on oat crops are also at high risk as green feed oats have a very low calcium content.

Sudden changes in feed, either in feed type or grazing regime, will cause short-term starvation and on to hypocalcaemia (milk fever)

Affected ewes will appear staggery and reactive but rapidly become unable to stand. They will usually be found sitting on their brisket with their head turned onto the flank. They often regurgitate ruminal contents and may develop a vaginal prolapse (bearing). Often have a snotty nose.

Treatment with a calcium injection is often very effective and rapid. They will get up within 15 – 30 minutes, urinate, walk away and feed. If they don't respond they need to be checked for pregnancy toxaemia (sleepy sickness) as these conditions often occur together.

When feeding grain, limestone can be fed at a rate of 1.5kg to 100kg grain to try and increase calcium availability. Vitamin D administration can help with calcium uptake.

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Ringworm isn't a worm....but will make your skin crawl....

Dermatophytosis, better known as Ringworm, is actually caused by fungi. There are different species causing similar signs. It affects the hair shaft and the superficial skin layer. We most commonly see it in kittens, puppies and immunocompromised animals. These would include animals that are under stress, such as malnourishment or overcrowding. Certain breeds seem to be more predisposed to getting infected. The fungus gets transmitted by contact, either direct or indirect. The spores or hyphae of the fungi stick to animate and inanimate objects and is transferred in this manner. It can take anything from 2-4 weeks from getting into contact with it, before symptoms are seen.

Clinically you might find hairless patches that could be itchy and scaling. These skin lesions could be irregular, circular, single or multiple. Hair left in these regions seems like they have broken off or pulls out very easily. The affected areas can range from the ears, nose, feet, around nail beds to all over the body.

These lesions can be confused with a few other skin conditions, therefore it is important to see your vet sooner than later. Another reason to act quickly is because it is a contagious condition for other animals and people as well. Also, when an animal is left without treatment, secondary complications such as bacterial infections can make delayed treatment more difficult and chronic.

Treatment depends on the severity and how the animal responds to therapy. Options include topical antifungal creams, shampoos. Systemic antifungal therapy might be combined with topical medications. Multi-animal homes, catteries and animal facilities needs to follow an in depth and strict disinfecting protocol together with treatment.

Washing your hands after working with animals, especially ones that looks suspicious is the best prevention. If an animal has been diagnosed, prevention in a multi-animal household would be to keep them apart, washing hands in between touching animals and disinfecting the area.

Nitrate poisoning:

Livestock are susceptible to nitrate poisoning in certain conditions. Rapidly growing plants after a drought, growing in a rich, nitrogenous soil, are the most dangerous. The main risk plants include second-growth rape, choumollier and turnips, immature green oats and annual rotation grasses. A frost or low sunlight days can increase the risk.

Poisoning is related to the rate of ingestion rather than the quantity and also depends on the type of feed, the amount of carbohydrate in the feed and the time the animal has had to adapt to the nitrate in the feed.

Nitrate is converted to nitrite in the rumen which is then absorbed and binds to blood, reducing oxygen carrying capacity.

Animals may be found dead or may show unsteadiness, collapse, difficulty breathing, brown gums and around eyes, and brown blood. Can also lead to abortion in pregnant animals.

If signs of poisoning are seen, move animals slowly and carefully off the toxic feed, feed them hay and seek advice from your vet. Animals that won't move must be treated where they are as pushing them to move can be fatal.

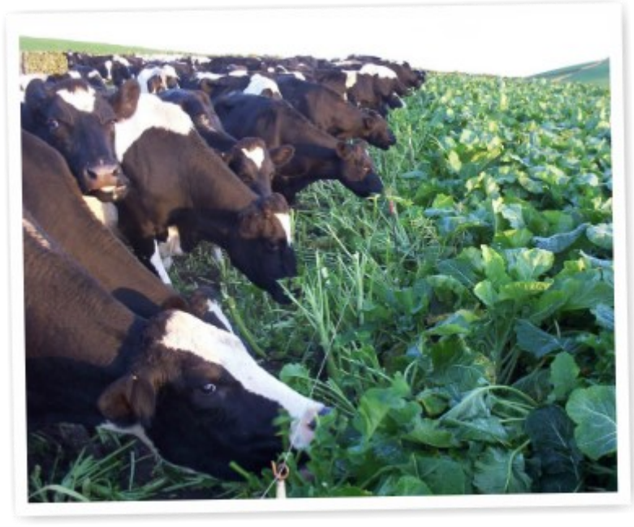
There are ways to manage different levels of toxicity in your crops and it is advisable to talk this through with your vet. Some possible options include:

1. Test any suspect forage before it is grazed.
2. Feed hay before introducing animals to the paddock so they are not as hungry.
3. Only graze the paddock for short times each day eg. half an hour.
4. Wait until the frost has lifted and the dew has dried before putting animals on the crop.
5. Get advice around using nitrogen fertilisers (urea) late in the season.

There are some good resources on-line:

https://www.dairynz.co.nz/animal/cow-health/nitrate-poisoning/

https://www.farmlands.co.nz/Help/FarmingAdvice/GrainAndSeed/Nitrate-poisoning-in-winter-feed-managing-the-risks/



Growths, lumps and bumps...

Not all growths, lumps and bumps are cancerous, but all have the potential to be so. Also, cancerous growths are either benign or malignant. The size of the growth, lump or bump isn't necessarily an indication of malignancy.

So, it can be difficult for you to decide if you have to be concerned or not, therefore it is best to visit your vet for advice. As there is a huge variety of lumps that can look similar, your vet needs to see and palpate the affected area and do diagnostics where required to get a better idea of what we are dealing with. The sooner it is attended to the better the outcome! Another reason is that lots of cancers can spread throughout the body.

A mast cell tumour on a dog's foot—these can be very malignant

A few important things for you to take note off:

* Where on the body is it located? The skin on feet, limbs, head and tail is limited to how much it can stretch, so the smaller the growth the easier it is to remove with good skin closure.

* How many are there? Do they feel and look the same? Any new ones noted recently?

* How long has it been there for? Just all of the sudden or longer, does it come and go?

* Is it getting bigger? How fast is it growing - days, months, years? The faster it grows the bigger the chance of it being aggressive.

* Is your animal bothered by it? Is the animal constantly licking it?

* Is it painful when touched? Or is the animal lame if it is on a leg?

* What does it feel like? Is it hard, soft, warm, swollen, attached to muscle underneath or loose in the skin or on top of skin?

*What does it look like? Is it well defined, ulcerated, discharging anything?

The list is just to give you an indication of how complicated it can be to determine what we are dealing with and how serious it is; these are things that we as vets need to know to give us a better indication of treatment protocol. Sometimes it is something different like a cyst, an abscess or an allergic reaction. The important thing is that it gets attention sooner rather than later!

A histiocytoma—a benign tumour

Another good reason to have it looked at is for the simple fact that some diseases or cancer of internal organs that we can't see, can show up on the skin.

If it's worth cutting off its worth sending away…