

# Prevent metabolic diseases after wet winter

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Talk of planning for turnout on to still waterlogged pasture may appear premature.

However, it is more appropriate than ever to plan carefully this spring. The unseasonably warm, wet conditions are likely to encourage considerable early grass growth, which could contribute to increased risk of metabolic problems at turnout. However, a number of preventative measures can be taken.

## Maintain dry matter intakes by gradually transitioning to grazing and closely monitor cows

\* Higher yielding dairy cows are particularly vulnerable at this time, as both intakes and feed value of early season grazing are frequently overestimated.

It is important to emphasise that maintaining dry matter intake during the turnout period is critical and intakes should be supported by a gradual transition to grazing, alongside ongoing provision of a portion of the winter ration.

Remember, dry matter intakes will be heavily influenced by both management factors and environmental conditions.

Lush, spring pasture typically has a dry matter of only 15-20% and is low in total fibre and effective fibre content, which will predispose to an increased gut transit time.

High yielding cows should be carefully monitored for signs of clinical or subclinical ketosis and acidosis so problems can be detected early.

Monitoring could include:

- \* Weekly ketone testing of at-risk cows
- \* Assessment of body condition loss
- \* Faecal consistency scores
- \* Milk yields and milk quality (percentage of butterfat) in the early lactation group.

## Maintaining fertility levels

\* Management of fertility around turnout is also problematic, with a marked reduction in pregnancy rates often reported during this period.

There are likely to be multiple factors influencing this and may be a reflection of poor energy status due to variable feed intakes and/or

reduced/disrupted oestrus detection.

Non-pregnant cows should be housed on a full winter ration until the end of the service period.

## Frothy bloat

\* Frothy bloat is the most common form of bloat. The condition can appear suddenly in herds grazing lush spring (or autumn) pastures. The condition occurs when froth or foam is produced in the rumen due to increased viscosity of the rumen fluid. This prevents the gaseous by-products of normal rumen fermentation from being belched

out by the cow and gas therefore accumulates within the rumen.

Onset of symptoms typically occur four to six hours after access to pasture and include:

- \* Abdominal distension
- \* Frequent bellowing and kicking of the abdomen
- \* Death may occur within as little as 30-60 minutes.

When an outbreak occurs, immediately remove the herd from the pasture and provide them with a source of long fibre. The pasture should not be grazed again for 10-14 days.

Anti-foaming agents should be administered via a stomach tube to reduce the viscosity of the rumen fluid and disperse the foam. All animals showing signs of distension should be treated.

If the rumen remains distended after an hour, repeat the drench treatment. In some peracute cases an emergency rumenotomy incision may be necessary.

To reduce risk cows should be introduced to high risk pastures gradually. Long fibre should be fed before grazing. Strip grazing can also be used to restrict access.