

## Vol. 37 No. 356

## September, 2023

### A guide to Calvings!

Most cows and heifers will calve without assistance. However, abnormal calf presentations, also known as dystocias, can interrupt the birthing process. In these circumstances, your animal will require assistance. The faster a dystocia is identified and corrected, the higher the chances of delivering a live, healthy calf and a better outcome for the cow. A common calving question we get asked as veterinarians is **“How do I know when it’s time to intervene?”**. Let’s address this below.

#### Typical calving management protocol

- Move cows and heifers into a close-up pen 3-4 weeks before they are due.
- Check the close-up pen first thing in the morning, every few hours thereafter, and last thing at night for signs of labor and calving.
- Labor begins once the water bag breaks – we do not often see this. Instead, we may observe restless behavior, relaxed tail head ligaments, a mucous string from the vulva, a bagged-up udder and decreased feed intake.
  - Cows: Typically give birth within 1-4 hours from the start of labor.
  - Heifers: Typically give birth within 2-6 hours from the start of labor.
- Monitor cows and heifers every hour when in labor. Progress, such as the calf’s feet coming up into the vulva, must be observed. Once a cow begins to actively push, the calf should be delivered within approximately 1 hour.
- **If no hourly progress is seen, it is time to intervene!** Put a long plastic sleeve on, apply lubricant gel and perform a vaginal exam to assess cervical dilation and to determine how the calf is coming out. If possible, correct any abnormal calf presentations and help deliver the calf.
- Do NOT start pulling the calf out unless you feel a **head and 2 front legs** OR a **tail and 2 back legs**.
  - Front legs: Fetlock and knee joints bend in the same direction.
  - Back legs: Fetlock and hock joints bend in opposite directions.
- Do NOT manipulate the jaw of a calf as it is easily broken.
- Always check the cow for a twin, or even a triplet!
- If you feel unsure, or think the calving is not progressing as it should, please call the clinic. Quick intervention is the key to success in many calvings.

#### Calf care

- Once born, place the calf on its chest in the recovery position\* (sternal recumbency).
- Verify that the calf is breathing. If it’s not, clear the nostrils of mucus, pour cold water on its head and rub vigorously along its ribs.

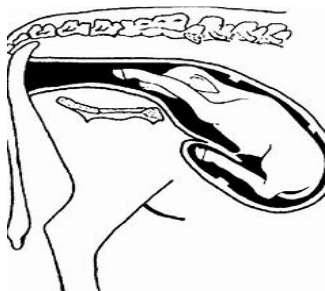
#### Essential on-farm calving supplies

- Long plastic sleeves for vaginal and rectal exams
- Lubricant gel
- 2 x 60-inch calving chains
- 2 calving handles

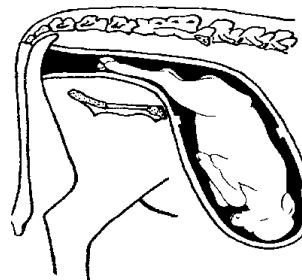


### What are **normal** calf presentations?

**“Diving position”:** You can feel the head and 2 front legs. Place calving chains on each foot with a loop of chain above and below the fetlock\*\* and pull calf out using calving handles.



**“Backwards”:** You can feel the tail and 2 back legs. Place calving chains on each foot with a loop of chain above and below the fetlock\*\* and pull calf out using calving handles.

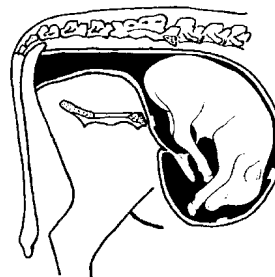


### What are common **abnormal** calf presentations?

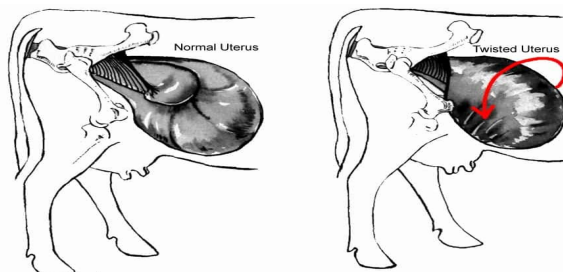
**“Head back”:** You can feel 2 front legs, but no head. Push the front legs back into the cow as far as possible and try to swing the head around. Then proceed to deliver the calf as normal if the head is facing forward.



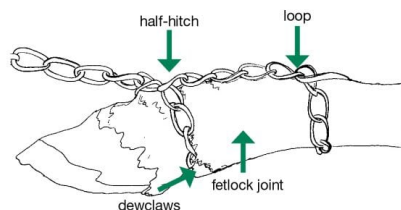
**“Breech”:** You can feel a tail but no legs. To correct this, you will need to push the bum forward into the cow to give you more room to bend and pull the back legs out one at the time.



**“Twisted uterus/uterine torsion”:** Whether it is a complete or incomplete torsion, this is considered an emergency! Phone the clinic as a vet needs to come out ASAP to correct the torsion and deliver the calf.



\*\*The fetlock is the joint above the hoof as pictured in this diagram.



Once again, if you are unable to deliver a calf in a timely manner, contact the clinic to have one of our veterinarians come to assist you! For any other questions, talk to your herd veterinarian. Don't forget to stock up on your calving supplies.

Happy back to school!  
Dr. Laura Michalovic

## Upcoming Stat Holdidays

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The clinic will be closed Thanksgiving Weekend, October 7-9. As always, veterinarians will be available 24-7 for emergency service. The Saturday fee schedule will remain unchanged from non-stat weekends.

## Welcome Dr. Jesse Vandenberg & Dr. Zara Silberberg

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You may begin to see some new faces around your farm! Heartland is proud to announce that Dr. Jesse Vandenberg and Dr. Zara Silberberg have recently joined the team as large animal associate veterinarians. Please join us in welcoming Dr. Vandenberg and Dr. Silberberg to our team!

## Fly Control

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Have you heard the buzz? Large animal technicians are now offering fly prevention in combination with dehorning services. Ask your large animal tech for more information!

