

Laminitis – Tips from the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Equines



Laminitis is a serious condition that causes inflammation in the foot that may result in severe pain, abnormal foot growth and lameness. If untreated or if treatment is unsuccessful, laminitis can lead to permanent structural changes in the foot, gait abnormalities and continual or recurrent bouts of foot pain. The pain from laminitis can become severe enough to necessitate euthanasia on humane grounds.

Known or suspected causes of laminitis include grain overload, obesity, severe infections (such as severe diarrhea), Equine Metabolic Syndrome, “Equine Cushings” (PPID) and excessive concussion of the hooves. Diet plays a key role in triggering laminitis, particularly the consumption of pasture or feeds high in simple sugars, starches and fructans.

Signs of acute laminitis include:

- lameness (including a cautious, stilted gait)
- increased heat in the feet and/or a bounding pulse in the feet (felt at the pastern or fetlock)
- shifting weight to the hind end and front feet stretched out
- reluctance to pick up the feet.

REQUIREMENTS

Horses with laminitis must receive appropriate lifelong management and treatment, which may include medications, dietary management and hoof care.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- a) Reduce the risk of laminitis through the following strategies:
 - do not let horses get too fat - ensure they are at an ideal body condition score and are not overfed relative to their energy needs
 - ensure any changes to the diet are gradual
 - restrict at-risk horses from grazing on lush pasture (i.e. plentiful, bright green grass)
 - store grains securely such that horses cannot gain access. In the case where a horse gains unrestricted access to grain, call a veterinarian immediately - do not wait for signs of laminitis to appear
- b) Consult a veterinarian to determine special care that may be needed for a horse that has had laminitis. Horses that have had laminitis are at increased risk of developing the disease again and the condition can become chronic
- c) Ensure communication between the veterinarian and farrier to determine whether corrective trimming or therapeutic shoeing may be needed.

Excerpted directly from Canada’s [Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Equines](#)

To learn more about the structures of the horse and how they function take Equine Guelph’s online course [Functional Anatomy](#).