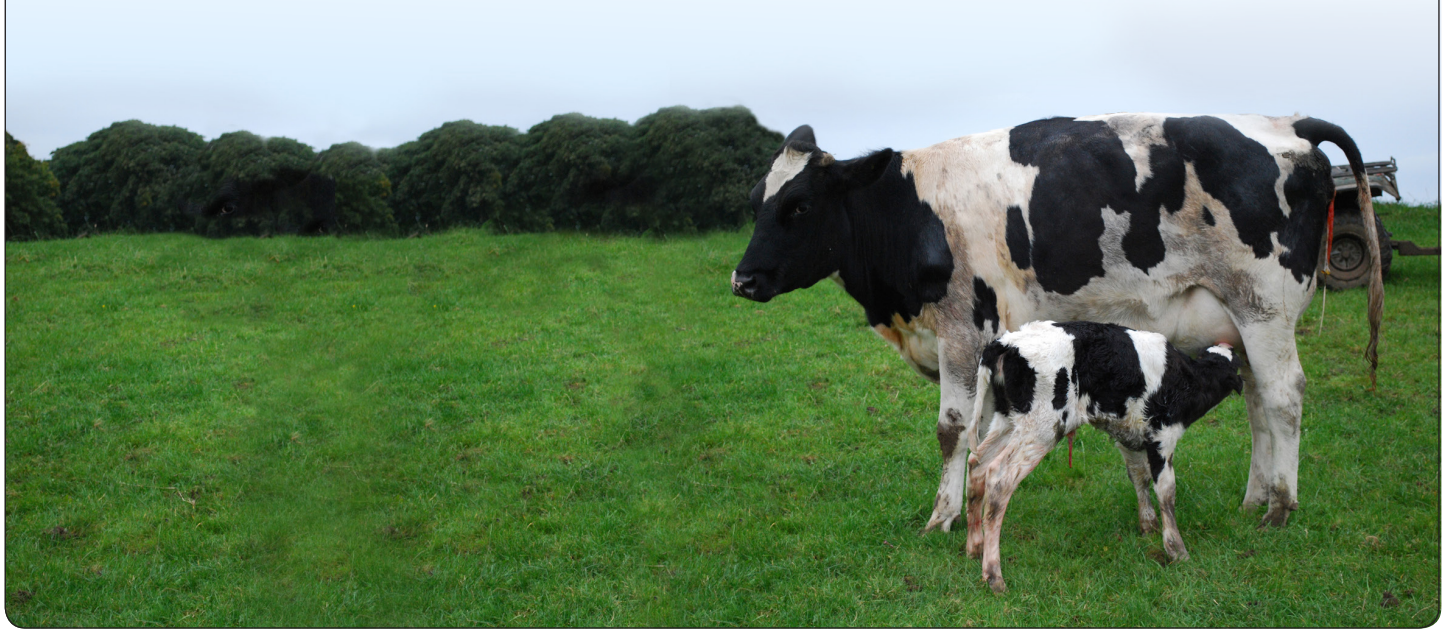
Managing the Transition Cow

The time immediately around calving (transition period) is one of the critical parts of a cow's year for many health and production reasons. It is worth noting that:

- Dairy cows are more susceptible to nutritional deficits at this time. So the aim of management in this period is to minimise these deficits particularly in relation to dry matter intakes (DMI's) and energy and mineral balance.
- Cows will have reduced intakes in the last 1-2 days pre-calving and their immune system is suppressed. This makes the cow very vulnerable to transition disease which can have a large impact on the following lactation as well as increasing the risk of mortality.



Milk fever (hypocalcaemia)

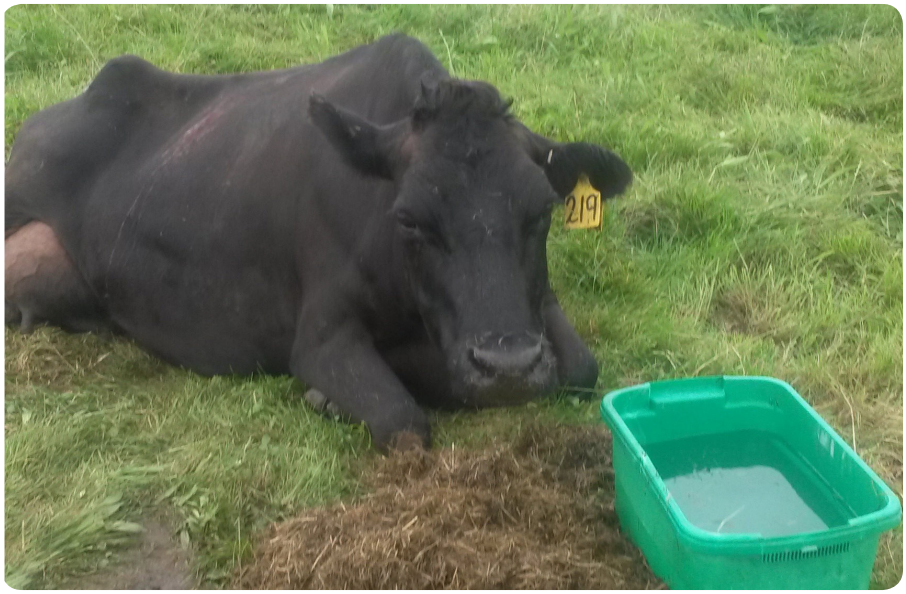
This is the most common metabolic problem immediately around calving. Milk fever brings its own problems (see Milk fever factsheet), including sometimes the loss of the cow, either directly from the effects of hypocalcaemia or from injuries caused when struggling to rise or down for too long. There are also many problems that follow on from milk fever including:

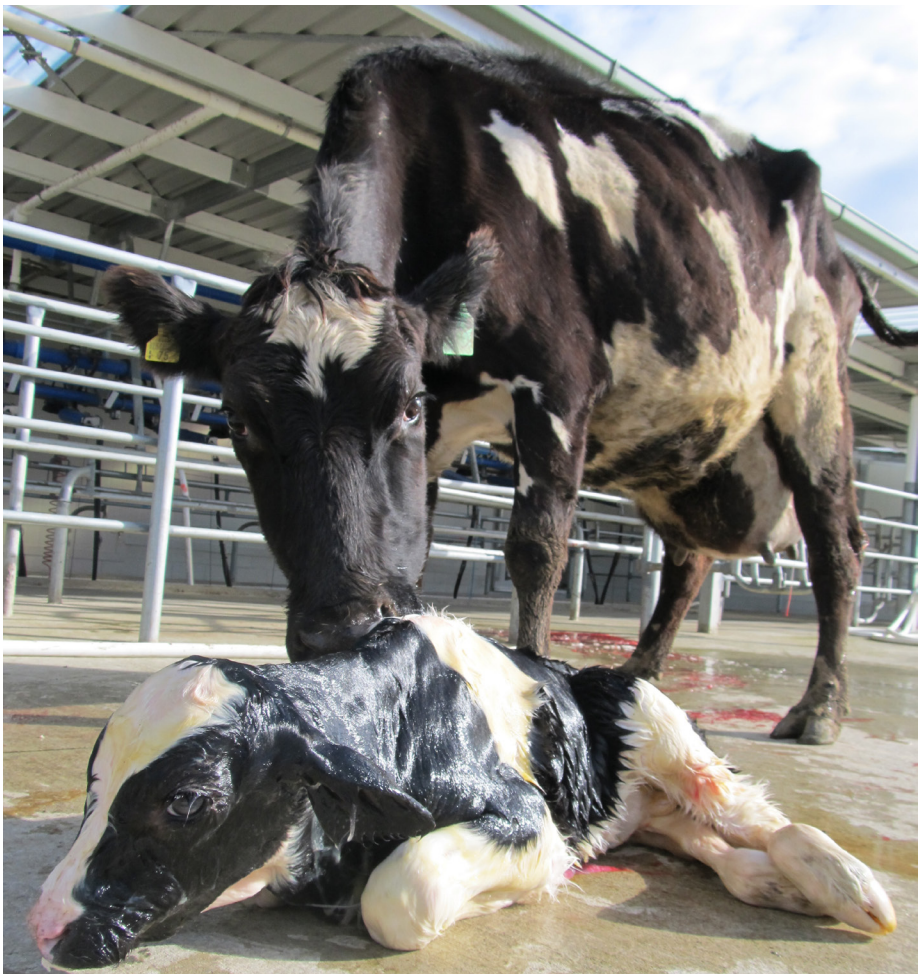
- A high proportion of cows that have milk fever or subclinical milk fever will retain their afterbirth (RFM) and many of these subsequently develop metritis (uterine infections)
- Cows with RFM or metritis will produce less milk per day at the start of lactation
- Cows with RFM or metritis will take longer to show heat
- Cows with RFM have reduced fertility
- (Sub)Clinical milk fever increases the likelihood of a cow developing a left displaced abomasum
- Milk fever can also dramatically increase the likelihood of getting mastitis in the following lactation.

Milk fever can be controlled by good transition management practices with focus on stimulating DMIs, supporting immune function, using dietary cation-anion difference (DCAD) in the last 10-14 days of the dry period and sufficient supplementing of magnesium pre calving and calcium/magnesium post calving.

The control of milk fever by increased focus on transition cow management will show huge improvements in the health of cows at calving and in their subsequent lactation. Your vet can advise on what is suitable on an individual farm basis.

Calving and Metabolic Disease CM





The importance of cow comfort

Cow comfort should not only be an important focus point for indoor housed cows, it applies for any type of cattle including pastured based herds. Cows in the transition period in particular require a strong focus on cow comfort and an ideally low stress/stressfree calving area. Improvements made in this area will consequently show a reduction in transition cow health issues and have therefore a positive impact on the subsequent early lactation.

Having enough feed space available per cow is also part of cow comfort. The minimum feed space allowance per cow on feed pads, barns, crop faces etc should be 0.6-0.8 metre/cow. If space is inadequate intakes will be reduced, predisposing cows to milk fever, ketosis, metritis, and displaced abomasums post calving.

For more information contact your local XLVets practice:

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