UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EXTENSION

ASSISTING WITH CALVING: STRATEGIES FOR WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

With calving, its not a matter of "IF", but "WHEN" problems occur.

This guide will walk you through when to intervene and help, abnormal presentations, how to do a pelvic exam and finally how to pull a calf.

When should you step in and help?

- Cow/Heifer is off by herself and restless for more than 6-8 hrs with no visible signs of labor
  - **Potential Issues: Problem with cervix dilation, calf size, abnormal presentation**
- The Cow/Heifer has been straining hard for more than 1 hr and either there is no calf showing or the calf's feet are showing when she strains, but go back inside when she rests.
  - **Potential Issues: Calf size, abnormal presentation, fatigue of the cow/heifer**
- Yellow-brown fluid (meconium) is present in the water bag or in the discharge
  - **Potential Issue: Calf is stressed and requires immediate help**
- The calf's feet are upside-down (bottoms of the feet are up instead of down) or only on foot is showing
  - **Potential Issues: Abnormal presentation and required immediate help to pull the calf quickly before it has the chance to suffocate (umbilical cord will get pinched in the mother's pelvis and cut off oxygen to the calf before it's head is out in the open air)**
- The calf's birthing process has completely stopped - no longer progressing forward
  - **Potential Issues: Calf size, fatigue on the part of the cow/heifer**

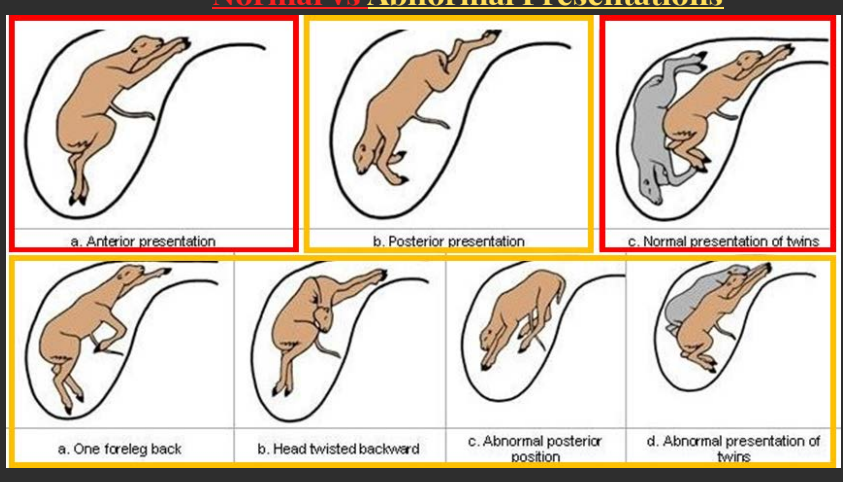
How to do a Pelvic Exam on your Cow/Heifer:

1. Make sure you and your equipment is clean - dirt and bacteria can cause repro problems down the road
   a. Equipment to have ready: two buckets - one with hot water and one with hot water and disinfectant, ob lube, paper towels, calving chains and handle or calf straps, ob sleeves and disposable gloves. (Chains and handles or calf straps can be in the disinfectant bucket)
2. Restrain the cow/heifer in a head catch or chute
3. Clean the anus, vulva and tail with disinfectant water - rinse with clear water and dry area with paper towels
4. Put on ob sleeves or disposable gloves. Apple plenty of ob lube to sleeves or gloves - this will help work in the cow while determining dilation and fetal positioning.

What You're Looking to Determine with This Exam:

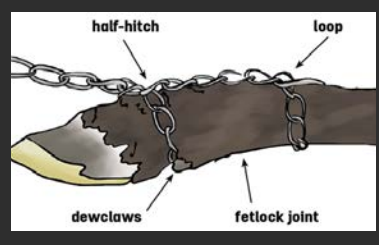
1. **Cervical Dilation** - is there enough space for the calf to get out. DO NOT try and pull before she's dilated.
2. **Position of the Calf** - Normal or Abnormal
3. **Size of the Calf** - Is the calf too large to fit through the pelvis
4. **Enough lubrication in the birth canal** - DO NOT use soap, it causes inflammation and swelling, ONLY use lube or Vaseline

Normal vs Abnormal Presentations

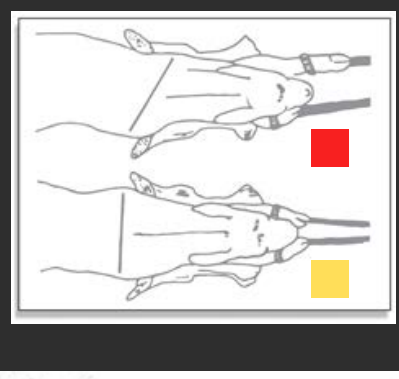


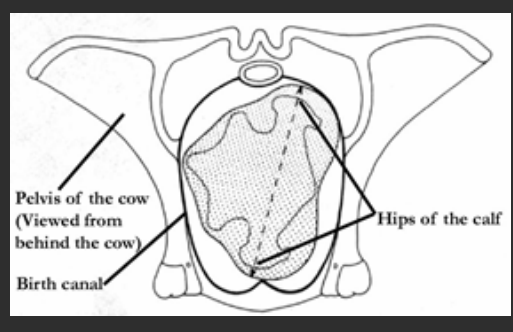
Pulling the Calf:

1. Wrap the ob chains or calf straps around each foot - Make sure to alternately pull one side at a time to "walk out" the shoulders through the pelvic opening
   a. **Shoulder Lock** - This can happen when pulling both legs at the same time causing both shoulders to try to go through the pelvis opening at the same time and become "Locked"
      i. **To fix:** push one shoulder backwards in the pelvis, while pulling the other leg forward.
2. Maintain constant pressure and only pull when she pushes, if possible - let her help you do the work
   a. The greatest chance of uterine or cervical tearing is when the calf's head and shoulder travel through the birth canal - pressure helps with dilation - pulling without proper dilation will cause damage to both the cow and calf.
3. When the head and shoulders are out, rotate the calf a quarter turn to help get their hips through the pelvis.
   a. If this didn't help further delivery, pull the calf at a downward 45-degree angle (This will make the calf near parallel with the rear legs of the cow when she's standing)
   b. **Hip Lock -** This is when the calf's hips get stick in the pelvis of the cow
      i. **To fix:** Push the calf backward through the pelvis (this will not be easy) and rotate the calf a quarter turn.



"Walk Out" vs Shoulder Lock Pulling





****The maximum pressure a cow can handle is 400lbs** (Two grown men can apply 400lbs of pressure when pulling - a calf jack can apply 1200lbs and a come-a-long 2000lbs) DO NOT use a calf jack unless you've been trained by your vet

Final Reminder: if you don't know what the problem is or you've been unsuccessful correcting it after 30 minutes - call your vet. Losses can be prevented by good observation and when needed, quick intervention.

Questions?

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