



Highgate Veterinary Clinic

Farm Case History

Displaced Abomasum

I was called to the farm of one of our contract farmer clients to see a new calved dairy cow which was not eating as well as expected. She had calved normally but instead of yielding 35 litres of milk each day, she was only giving 15 litres. The farmer had seen such cases before and told me he thought she had a “twisted stomach”.

The cow had a normal temperature, some diarrhoea and looked a little dull. Listening to her abdomen with my stethoscope, I confirmed my client’s suspicion. There was a large area of gas on the left side of the belly which “pinged” like a biscuit tin when I flicked the skin over that area.

The abomasum is the fourth stomach of the cow, which is similar to ours. It usually sits slightly to the right of midline at the bottom of the abdomen. Around calving it can float up to the left side and fill with gas. If not corrected to cow would lose large amounts of weight and stop producing milk.

There are a few ways of correcting the displacement. The simplest way is to lower the cow to the ground using a special arrangement of ropes (casting), then rolling her over so the stomach returns to its normal position. This works in a proportion of cases but many stomachs float back to the wrong place again. Full surgery, where the cow is cut open and the stomach is sutured back into position, ensures the abomasum stops in position. The downside is that the cow, which is already debilitated, now has to try to recover from the pain and possible infection of the surgery.

In this case, I used a method we’ve used for three years called trans-abdominal abomasal toggling (“toggling” for short). The cow was cast and rolled but to ensure the abomasum stayed where it should, two small holes were made and a stitch was placed through the skin and abomasal wall.

The cow was treated with one injection of antibiotic to deal with any bacterial contamination. Within two days, her appetite was approaching normal and her milk yield was increasing. Two weeks later, the farmer removed the stitch and she never looked back.

Displaced abomasums are caused by quick diet changes at calving. We have seen epidemics of this condition on farms but we now have a zero tolerance policy. One displaced abomasum on a farm prompts us to work urgently with the farmer and farm nutritionalist to prevent further cases.

Article by Mark Stott



“Casting” the cow



Listening for the “ping”



Making the first incision



Tom looking after the cow post-op