HEALTHYFEET



Hoof care field guide



DAIRY

Encouraging farmers, vets and advisors to work together to help reduce lameness in dairy cattle on UK farms

The AHDB Dairy Healthy Feet Programme is a bespoke plan for lameness reduction that aims to:

- Assess what factors are contributing to lameness
- Diagnose the lameness problems
- Develop an action plan with you to rectify the problem
- Monitor the progress being made

The HFP helps develop skills for long-term lameness control



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Photographs courtesy of Reaseheath College, Owen Atkinson MRCVS, Keith Cutler MRCVS, Nigel Cook, Nick Bell, Jon Reader, University of Nottingham, ICAR Claw Health Atlas and Neil Chesterton BVSc.

Introduction

We all want fewer lame cows

- Lame cows cost money
- · Lame cows have a reduced milk yield
- · Lame cows are in pain and are a welfare issue
- Lame cows take more time and effort to manage and lower morale

Reducing lameness requires a planned approach and a commitment from the whole farm team.

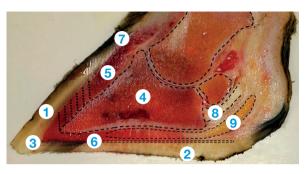
The four cornerstones of lameness reduction:

- Low infection pressure
- · Good horn quality and hoof shape
- · Low forces on the feet (good cow comfort and good cow flow)
- Early detection and prompt, effective treatment of lame cows

Early and effective treatment of lame cows is an essential part of successful lameness reduction. This guide will help you to do just that.



A normal foot: which bit does what?



- Wall horn this is equivalent to our finger nail and is by far the strongest horn and most important for bearing weight.
- 2. Sole horn equivalent to the foot pad on a dog or cat.
- White line the junction between wall horn and sole horn, made up of weaker horn.
- Pedal bone equivalent to the bone at the end of our finger tips, it is the main bone in the hoof (triangular in shape).
- Laminar corium (quick) important tissue supporting the pedal bone within the hoof wall (the 'laminae').
- Sole corium responsible for making new sole horn.
 Prone to damage leading to sole bruising, sole ulcers and white line heamorrhage.
- 7. Coronary band at the hairline at the top of the hoof wall. New wall horn grows down from here, taking about a year to reach the toe end and five months at the heel.
- 8. Flexor tendon attaches to the pedal bone. Damage following deep infection can lead to toe distortion.
- Digital cushion a dense fat pad under the heel. With the heel, it is very important for absorbing and dissipating force, and supporting the pedal bone, when the animal walks.

Hoof care tool kit

Having the correct equipment is half the job for good hoof care.



- 1. Antibiotic spray
- Foot blocks there are many different types available. Shown here is a fitted shoe type and a wooden block.
- 3. Gloves thick latex gloves are ideal.
- Wrist protectors the neoprene type are inexpensive and easy to clean.
- Hoof knives 1 x left handed and 1 x right handed, with a single edged blade. Narrow blades are generally easier to use and sharpen.
- 6. Hoof knife protectors a length of plumbing pipe, as shown here or an old milking machine liner, will help keep blades sharp and safe.

- Hoof trimmers quality nippers are a better investment than clumsy choppers.
- Hoof testing pliers an under-used but essential bit of kit which can make life so much easier.
- 9. Knife sharpener
- Measuring tool to get correct toe length and sole thickness.

Anti-inflammatory

Recent research suggests that lameness cure is maximised with anti-inflammatory (NSAID) treatment in addition to therapeutic trimming and elevation of the diseased claw using a block when cows are newly and predominantly mildly lame. Speak to your vet for advice.



Knife know-how

Both of these knifes are left-handed. The one at the top has a hardened stainless steel blade.



More expensive knives have blades of harder steel: they stay sharper longer but are harder to sharpen.

Most new knives need pre-sharpening before use.

A grinding wheel or angle grinder should be used to make the cutting edge more gradually tapered, like the blade on the right.

This will ensure the edge stays sharper for longer and will be much easier to re-sharpen.

Remember to disinfect hoof knives between cows to reduce the risk of spreading digital dermatitis from cow to cow.



Sharpening a knife

- 1. Never sharpen the back side of the knife.
- 2. Touch the blade up regularly.
- 3. Keep the blade tapered at about 10°.



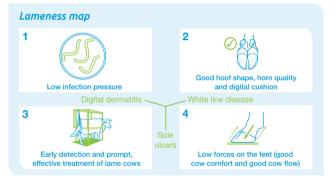


A purpose made knife sharpener has a narrow sanding belt and a cloth polishing wheel. It turns in the opposite direction to bench grinders. Wear goggles and always ensure the sanding belt rotates away from you.

Healthy feet programme

The AHDB Dairy Healthy Feet Programme is based around four key success factors:

- 1. Low infection pressure foot bathing and slurry management.
- 2. Good horn quality and hoof shape foot trimming.
- 3. Early detection and effective treatment of lame cows facilities, confidence and competence of staff and mobility scoring.
- 4. Low forces on the feet good cow flow and cow comfort.



- Every herd has different lesion patterns. Once you know yours, you can use the Lameness map to develop a programme to improve herd mobility
- Confusion with recognising lesions: different names for the same condition and lesions not looking like text book pictures!
- Many feet will have more than one lesion. Lesion distribution may change with season
- Lesions may be caused by infection or be non-infectious
- A non-infectious lesion, such as a sole ulcer, can become infected when dirt and bacteria get access to living tissue
- Infection in the white line causes an abscess, pus can track up and burst out

Foot conditions: common lesion types

An injury or condition of the foot is called a lesion.

Infectious or skin conditions







Foul

Digital dermatitis

Non-infectious conditions are lesions of the horn and cannot spread from cow to cow.

Non-infectious conditions



Sole bruising

Sole ulcer

White line disease

Spot – Lift – Look

Prompt action for lame cows is a key to success

1. Spot

It is most important to spot the cows that have just gone lame. If these are dealt with immediately, treatment can be a relatively simple and rewarding job. The



chronically lame cows who have had a problem for a long time can be much more difficult to treat effectively and disease is more likely to recur.

Regular mobility scoring is the best way to spot newly lame cows. See the Appendix on page 39 for more details.

2. Lift

To find out what is causing the lameness and then effectively treat it, you need to lift the foot. This should be easy, safe and not unpleasant for you or the cow.



It should be possible for one person to get one cow in the crush in one minute.

3. Look

Sometimes the cause is easy to spot while other cases need more skill to detect. Proper training in practical cattle hoof care will build confidence in correctly finding and dealing with lesions.



Applying pressure to different parts of the foot using a pair of hoof-testing pliers is much better than digging at black marks.

Don't delay, treat today

Early identification and prompt, effective treatment of claw horn lesions is key to their successful management. for advice.

If animals are treated early, you will not necessarily find lesions that look significant. This is great news. Apply a block to the sound claw and treat with an anti-inflammatory to maximise recovery (don't be tempted to over-trim).

When treating lame cows with claw horn lesions, they should be considered to have lesions on both hindlegs regardless of which leg is identified as lame. A therapeutic trim (plus additional treatment(s) as required) of the non-lame leg should be carried out at the time of examination.

Recent research has shown that any delay in the time to treatment of claw horn lesions, regardless of the treatment administered, is likely to reduce the rate of recovery.

Lifting a foot: handy tips

Good quality hoof trimming is a difficult skill to master and a poor quality job can actually make cows lame. A practical training course is strongly recommended for all new trimmers. Regular refresher courses help to keep you up-to-date and to improve technique.

Keep it easy

- Have a comfortable crush for inspecting feet
- Make sure the crush is always available and clean in an area where you are happy to work: light, dry and airy is best



The back chain

A chain around the back of the cow allows you to lift a hind foot without the need for tying the leg to the back f the crush or a block, which cows resent and positions the foot at an awkward angle. Many crushes can be simply adapted, shown on the right.

Thread the back chain through the leg strap.



The belly band

These are useful to give the cow more confidence and security while lifting feet, particularly front feet. The band should be wide, forward on the animal and loose fitting.



Take more of the cow's weight with the belly band, but avoid overtightening – the band is there to support but not to take the cow's weight. (You should still be able to fit fingers between the band and the cow).

Lifting the opposite back leg may help in some crushes.

If a cow falls forward on the yoke she can choke or crush the nerves on the point of her shoulder which supply her front leg.

Where to stand

Have your back to the cow and stand on the outside of your knee: you can work comfortably this way.



Front feet

Invest in a purpose built foot support.



Trimming cows feet

Before you begin, lift the foot so the cow is comfortable. Clean and dry the foot with sawdust. Work safely – do not stand where you are likely to be kicked.





Avoid over trimming

The most important thing when trimming cows' feet is always to err on the side of caution and not take too much off, especially from the inner claw on hind feet.









Trimming steps: five-step Dutch method

Step 1

Start with inner claw of hind foot and the outer claw of the front foot.

Measure the inner hind claw from where the top of the claw goes hard. 8cm is a safe length for most young, healthy



- Add ~5mm if the wall is measured from the hair line instead of the point at which the claw goes hard
- Add ~5mm if the claw is trimmed to a point, instead of leaving a step at the toe.

9cm will be required if the claw is measured from the hairline and no step is left at the toe.

Warning: This is only a guide on length for second lactation Holsteins. There is no easy method for predicting the optimum length. Optimum length will vary around this - length needs to be adjusted for age, breed, environmental conditions and disease.

Remove excess sole down to 5–7mm. Avoid trimming the rear of the sole in order to maintain heel height and keep the toe level.

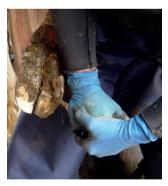
If unsure always err on the side of safety and avoid over trimming.

Repeat for outer claw, levelling up to the inner claw. Normally more horn has to be removed from the outer claw. Only minimal horn is removed from the inner claw to retain weight-bearing.

Take care not to remove the axial white line weightbearing horn which stretches back from the toe a third of the way along the axial wall (inner wall of claw).



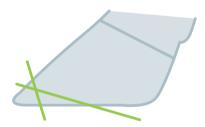








Match to correct toe length



Equal toe depth
Care taken if presented with curled toes



50:50 weight-bearing
Care taken if risk of thin sole

Model (dish) out the inner parts of both claws, behind the wall on the inner claw edge, to allow a flow of muck between the toes and to reduce weight-bearing on the typical sole ulcer site – see area circled yellow.

It is important the modelling does not extend into the toe triangle as this results in removal of the weight-bearing axial wall.





For routine foot checks and trims, such as at drying off, these three steps will be sufficient if no injury or problem is found. Proceed to steps 4 and 5 wherever a problem exists.

This step is for creating a height difference for a painful claw (one with a horn lesion) so injured parts bear less weight and are allowed to recover. In most cases horn is removed from the back 2/3 of the outer claw.

In the majority of cases, a block should be applied to the sound inner claw to create a height difference.

If not applying a block check the height difference with the flat of the hoof knife handle.







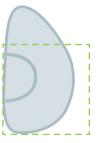
Always conserve horn on the inner claw to bear weight.

Remove any loose horn from the heel, there will be more in cases of heel horn erosion. Beware of removing too much weight-bearing surface from the bulbs of the heel. Check between the claws and at the heel for digital dermatitis.









Only back 2/3 of outer hind claw

The procedure for front feet is similar, except that the outer claw is trimmed first and the inner claw is the most likely to have injuries. Preserve horn on the outer claw.

Only back

hind claw

1/3 of inner

Trimming pitfalls: some dos and don'ts



Avoid over-trimming

- Measure correctly from where the wall is hard/thick (not the hairline)
- Don't guess
- · Recognise when a foot doesn't need trimming
- Check for thin soles





X Don't over-trim the wall

- The wall is the most important weight-bearing structure
- · A mistake commonly made with grinders is 'shaping' the wall
- Preserve the wall on the inside edge too, which is at the front third of the foot





Avoid chasing black marks

- A trimmed foot does not have to appear white!
- Cracks and flakes on the sole are normal - avoid trimming away sole unnecessarily, especially at the toe
- In particular, always preserve horn on the inner claw (or outer for front feet)



Digital dermatitis: principles of treatment

Symptoms

Digital dermatitis (DD) is usually found at the back of the heel but can be between the toes, on the hair line at the front or side of the foot or even on exposed corium from another injury, such as a white line abscess. Such digital dermatitis infections of the corium are associated with DD complicated claw horn lesions.









Digital dermatitis is a skin infection, usually found near the bulbs of the heel. You must lift the foot to treat it effectively.

Preventing the spread of new infections and re-development of dormant lesions is critical to control of DD. Regular foot bathing, hygiene and disinfection at foot trimming and steps to improve yard or pen hygiene are key to prevention. To monitor spread of DD assess the number of cows with lesions by hosing feet in the parlour and assess general cow foot cleanliness.

Remove dead tissue

The bacteria hide deep in the skin and are covered by dead skin and sticky ooze. This must be removed by wiping hard.



Digital dermatitis is extremely sensitive to most antibiotics but can be hard to treat as the bacteria hide deep in the skin.

Step 2

Apply antibiotic spray

A licensed antibiotic spray can be used and works well. Repeat treatments will be necessary for more severe cases. The bacteria prefer an oxygen-free environment so leaving the area open to the air is recommended. If bandages are used (to hold bactericide in place) they must be removed within 2 days.





The area to be treated must be cleaned well before applying spray.

Foul: principles of treatment

Symptoms

- Sudden onset lameness
- Skin between claws is broken
- Symmetrical swelling and heat around the foot
- It smells





Cows with interdigital growths can be prone to foul. Growths can be as a result of previous foul infections.



Very aggressive forms of foul are called 'super foul'. Digital dermatitis is also sometimes seen on the same foot.

Ask your vet to look at animals if a) there has been no improvement or b) there is a need to cut into corium (flesh) as this requires local anaesthesia.

Step 1

Clean out the cracked skin between the claws.

Check for and remove any loose stones.



Step 2
Spray the relevant area with a topical treatment.



Step 3

Inject the cow with appropriate antibiotics.

Seek advice from your vet.



Step 4

Give anti-inflammatory pain relief (NSAID) under veterinary guidance.



Injury of the horn: principles of treatment

Begin by following steps 1 to 3 of foot trimming method (see pages 16–20)

Always correct the toe length and foot balance before seeing to the problem. Take care not to take too much horn away by unnecessarily following black marks.



Step 1

Take weight away from the injury

This is the main principle of treatment. For less severe problems this can be done by carefully trimming around the affected area (often the back two thirds of the outer hind claw). Preserve the sole and wall on the unaffected claw.



White line lesion



A sole ulcer



Check height

Step 2
Block the unaffected claw if necessary

Most blocks require 3-5mm of glue in order to set.







Trimming alone is often insufficient to remove weight from the injury.

Step 3
Remove under-run horn



A false sole caused by pus tracking to the toe.



A white line abscess bursting out at the top of the wall.

Allow drainage so gravel and dirt does not get trapped in a pocket you have created.

A white line abscess may have pus tracking back towards the heel, forwards to the toe or up the wall. A sole ulcer may have some loose horn around its base. With care, these injuries can be opened up to allow drainage and to get air to the injury.

Sole ulcers may have flesh protruding – carefully trim around this but there is no need to cut it off.



Avoid bleeding. Bleeding means you have cut into live tissue and you are creating a new injury.

Removing under-run horn to the point of where it is firmly attached to the underlying corium requires care, time and skill. A blunt probe can help quide how much to remove.

Digitial dermatitis infection on the corium can occur and is thought to result in delayed healing or failure to cure. Exposing these lesions to air and treating with topical antibiotics is important.



Step 4 Pain relief

Give anti-inflammatory pain relief (NSAID) under veterinary quidance.



How to block a foot

Step 1

Clean the foot thoroughly.

Step 2

Dry with hair dryer or methylated spirits.

Step 3

Mix glue according to instructions.

Step 4

Apply block well back on sole of healthy foot. Push on firmly but do not squeeze too much of the glue out from between the sole and the block or it will not stick as well.

Step 5

Let the glue set thoroughly before letting the foot down.



Common pitfalls

- The block does not sit far enough back on the sole, so the cow walks on her heel (lengthening toe)
- The foot is not level before applying the block
- The foot is not dry enough so the glue doesn't stick well
- The glue is taking a long time to set due to cold weather: store all equipment in a warm place
- The block is left on too long: uneven wear at the heel leads to the cow rocking backwards as she walks
- The back of the block rubs the heel of the other claw
- The block slopes backwards
- The glue is applied too far back towards the soft horn of the heel
- Failing to give anti-inflammatory pain relief (NSAID) which has been shown to promote recovery

Check the block regularly and remove if wear is uneven or the block causes discomfort.

Cows with blocks should be rechecked at four weeks after treatment to ensure the lesion is healing and to check the block. If in doubt, remove the block. If the lesion has not healed and the block is badly worn, remove it and apply a new one.

AHDB Dairy has produced a short film on block techniques, which can be viewed on the AHDB Dairy YouTube channel.

Sole Bruising: principles of treatment

Symptoms

- Red or yellowish areas on the sole
- Often thin soles too
- · Cow walks stiffly
- Often more than one foot is affected



Animals commonly affected

- Freshly calved heifers which have not been acclimatised to concrete/cubicles
- Stock bulls
- · Cows walking a long way on tracks

How to treat it

- If only one claw is affected, apply a block to the healthy claw
- Do not remove excessive horn – the soles are often already thin
- 3. Rest the cow



Keep the cow on a soft surface (pasture or straw yard) until healed.

Extensive grazing herds: switch the cow to once a day milking and keep in a paddock close to the parlour while it recovers.

Tricky conditions: cases for the vet

Deep infection

You will see:

- Swelling around one claw
- The cow is very lame
- Often begins as a sole ulcer which has become infected
- The toe is 'cocked up'
- A bead of thick white pus can be squeezed from centre of ulcer









A 'club foot' can develop

Infection in the joint is very painful. Treatment will require surgery (carried out by a veterinary surgeon by law) or immediate culling.

Necrotic toe

- Often associated with digital dermatitis infection of the corium
- They can begin as a toe ulcer which has become infected or from an infection tracking under the wall of the coronary band
- The cow walks back on her heel
- There is usually no swelling of the foot
- The condition is very painful because the infection is to the bone in the foot
- Proper treatment requires surgery by a veterinary surgeon and use of anaesthetic





Interdigital growths

- Most of these are best left alone although careful trimming of any rough horn between the claws may reduce rubbing
- Some have digital dermatitis or foul which require treatment
- Removing growths is an act of veterinary surgery



Know the boundaries of your expertise: consult your vet if in any doubt.

The lame cow: aftercare

Lame cows need special attention

- They are less likely to compete at the feed face
- They find it harder to get up and down therefore are more prone to injury
- They are likely to slip down the "pecking order" and are less able to assert themselves in a crowd



Advantages of a lame cow group

- Small group size which can be managed to have a short milking time and less competition for feed and water
- Can be kept on loose housing or at pasture to allow cows extra room and grip to get up and down
- Speeds up recovery time



Every dairy farm should have a 'special needs' facility, for proper care of lame and injured cows. This should be separate from the calving and fresh cow group.

When to trim?

- Regularly mobility score cows to spot lame cows early
- · Don't wait to treat them
- Record all lesions found: your herd's lesion pattern is important to develop your lameness reduction plan

Every dairy farm should have a 'special needs' facility, for proper care of lame and injured cows. This should be separate from the calving and fresh cow group.

- Routine foot checks around drying off means cows calve down with good foot shape
- Include heifers prior to first lactation, only if they have overgrowth
- A second routine check 6–10 weeks into lactation, when horn disorders are most likely to be present, can be useful
- Some cows (for example extensive grazing herds) never need trimming, as hoof wear matches growth. However, regular hoof checks can still reduce lameness
- Using a professional hoof trimmer is sensible in many herd situations: they have the necessary skills and equipment
- Use a licensed hoof trimmer registered with the Register of Cattle Foot Trimmers (www.rocft.co.uk), the Cattle Hoof Care Standards Board (www.hoofcareregister.co.uk) or another recognised accreditation body

Think 'foot check' rather than 'foot trim'

Appendix

Further information and resources

dairy.ahdb.org.uk/mobility

The Healthy Feet Website www.cattle-lameness.org.uk

ICAR Claw Health Atlas

www.icar.org/documents/icar_claw_health_atlas.pdf

How to score your herd

In general:

- 1. Check your herd, ideally at least once a month.
- 2. Choose a time and a place which will allow you to observe cows, ideally on a hard (ie concrete) non-slip surface. Monitor each cow individually allowing them to make between 6–10 uninterrupted strides. Watch the cow from the side and the rear and if possible, ensure the cow turns a corner as part of her test.
- Record the identities of cows scoring 2 or 3 and schedule treatment with regular checks to ensure treatment is working.
- 4. Keep a tally of cows that are score 0 and 1.
- If you are uncertain about the exact score of a cow, make repeat observations. If you are still unsure, examine her feet.

Key benefits of scoring

- Every cow is regularly assessed for the early signs of poor mobility, prompting foot trimming and action lists.
- Mobility trends can be monitored to identify new problems at an early stage.
- 3. Provision of figures for benchmarking performance.
- 4. General foot health awareness is increased.
- Motivates farm staff to improve herd mobility and therefore overall herd health.

For further information on using the mobility score contact the extension team at AHDB Dairy on 024 7647 8684.

Mobility score

Description of Suggested Category of score cow behaviour action Good mobility - Score () Walks with No action needed even weight Routine bearing and (preventative) foot rhythm on all trimming when/if four feet, with a required flat back Record mobility at next scoring Lona, fluid session strides possible. Imperfect mobility - Score 1 Steps uneven · Could benefit (rhythm or from routine weight bearing) (preventative) foot or strides trimming when/if shortened: required affected limb Further observation or limbs not (preventative) foot immediately trimming when/if identifiable. required Further observation recommended

Category of score

Description of cow behaviour

Suggested action

Impaired mobility - Score 2



Uneven weight bearing on a limb that is immediately identifiable and/or obviously shortened strides (usually with an arch to the centre of the back).

- Lame and likely to benefit from treatment
- Foot should be lifted to establish the cause of lameness before treatment
- Should be attended to as soon as practically possible

Severely impaired mobility - Score 3





as fast as a brisk human pace (cannot keep up with the heep up with the heep up with the hearthy herd). Lame leg easy to identify – limping; may barely stand on lame leg/s; back arched when standing and walking.

- This cow is very lame and requires urgent attention, nursing and further professional advice
- Examine as soon as possible
- Cow will benefit from treatment
- Cow should not be made to walk far and kept on a straw yard or at grass
- In the most severe cases, culling may be the only possible solution

Example score sheet with workings

Mobility Sco	ore
--------------	-----

Farm: A. Farm
Date: 01/01/09

Scorer: A. Farmer

Total number of cows scored: 119



Score 0 and 1 Acceptable mobility	Score 2 Likely to benefit from treatment	Score 3 Very lame.Treatment urgently required
Tally the number of cows	Record the ID's of any cows showing signs of Score 2	Record the ID's of any cows showing signs of Score 3
Group 1 LHT LHT LHT III	202 412 34 78 55 20	101 67
Record and tally the number of cows scoring 0 or 1, ie 22.	Note the IDs of cows showing signs of Score 2, ie 6.	Note the IDs of cows showing signs of Score 3, ie 2.
Number of cows: 22	Number of cows: 6	Number of cows: 2
Group 2 WH WH WH WH WH II	22 29	412
Number of cows: 27	Number of cows: 2	Number of cows: 1
Group 3	10 15 107 66	21 73 44
THI THI THI	<i>5</i> 4 43 21 74	
	12 209 321 11	
Number of cows: 15	Number of cows: 12	Number of cows: 3
Group 4 LHT LHT LHT LHT IIII	36 667 62 48	16
Number of cows: 24	Number of cows: 4	Number of cows: 1
Total cows: 88 74%	Total cows: 24 20 %	Total cows: 7 6%
	Mobility index	
% of cows in the herd scoring 0 and 1		74 %

www.dairy.ahdb.org.uk/healthyfeet

Blank score sheet

arm:		
ate:		AGRICULTURE & HORTICULTUR DEVELOPMENT BOARD
corer:		
otal number of cows score	ed:	
Score 0 and 1 Acceptable mobility	Score 2 Likely to benefit from treatment	Score 3 Very lame.Treatment urgently required
Tally the number of cows	Record the ID's of any cows showing signs of Score 2	Record the ID's of any cows showing signs of Score 3
Group 1		
Number of cows:	Number of cows:	Number of cows:
Number of cows:	Number of cows:	Number of cows:
Group 3		
Number of cows:	Number of cows:	Number of cows:
Group 4		
Number of cows:	Number of cows:	Number of cows:
Total cows: 9	Total cows:	% Total cows: %
	Mobility index	

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