

# Laminitis in ponies when grass is strong

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An animal on many farms, for whom the sudden burst of fresh growth may not mean good news is the pony or cob.

Too much grass leads to weight gain and carbohydrate overload and one unfortunate consequence is the onset of laminitis. Although it is often associated with small fat ponies gorging on spring grass, laminitis can affect any type of horse, pony or donkey.

While lush grass is an important trigger factor, grazing alone does not tell the whole story. When ponies with an

underlying hormonal condition graze and ingest soluble carbohydrate, it causes abnormally high levels of insulin in their blood. The raised insulin level affects the vascular network in the sensitive laminae of the foot and disrupts the bond between the bone and the hoof, causing the clinical signs of laminitis.

Two such hormonal conditions in horses and ponies are equine cushing's disease, now known more correctly as PPID, and equine metabolic syndrome.

If you have a pony that's prone to laminitis this time

of year, your vet can perform a couple of screening tests via a blood sample to help detect the presence of either of these conditions. Some animals may have the two conditions present concurrently.

Swift identification of equine patients with PPID and/or equine metabolic syndrome helps arrest the disease early in its course. Although there is no cure for the problem, appropriate medical treatment and good routine healthcare can help keep your pony healthy.

Outside of these hormonal conditions, overeating and obesity are the most com-

mon high-risk situations that lead to laminitis. The secret to avoiding laminitis in this case is to begin a weight loss programme, start exercising and not to turn out the horse or pony while its fat score is greater than 3 (you should be able to easily feel the ribs by running your hand along its side, yet not be able to see the ribs).

Restriction of grass intake using a grazing muzzle or starvation paddock is a great help. Simply limiting duration of turnout is unlikely to be successful, as horses and ponies are able to consume

a large portion of their daily grass intake in the first two to three hours.

Laminitis is a very difficult condition to manage. It requires lots of co-operation between owner, farrier and vet and as the old adage says "prevention is better than cure".

Chris McGrath works at Comeragh Veterinary Kilmacthomas, Co Waterford, part of XLVets, a group of progressive practices working together to achieve a better future for agriculture and veterinary in Ireland. For more, go to [www.xlvets.ie](http://www.xlvets.ie).