



Difficult Births

A soft jelly-like rump is a great indicator of impending birth because, in all cases, the mares' muscles and birth canal need to relax to allow the foal to pass through.

While we don't like to think about this, sometimes things can go wrong with the pregnancy, and the best thing we can do is be as informed as possible.

We all hope for the best, but we should prepare for the worst.

Some common issues you might face include:

The foal is born sleeping

Here is the exact reason a human needs to be present. Occasionally the foal will be born sleeping and not breathing. It's important that someone wakes the foal asap.

Firstly make sure the white bag that the foal is in has broken. Clear the foals nostrils and mouth. Rub the foal's chest vigorously. If that doesn't work, pinch the inside of the foals nostril or cheek.

Hopefully the foal is just unconscious and not still born.

The bag doesn't break

Sometimes the bag (amniotic sac) is so thick that it doesn't break on its own. This is an emergency but hopefully the foal is still alive. Quickly break, tear or cut the sac and make sure the foal starts breathing.

Placentitis

Placentitis is an infection and inflammation of the placenta. It can occur at any stage of pregnancy, so it's important to keep your eyes peeled.

In general terms, placentitis releases inflammatory hormones - which can cause uterine contraction, and disrupts the blood supply to the foal. The infection can cause premature delivery of the foal, a weak and septic foal or a deceased foal.



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If placentitis is identified early, it can be treated and managed successfully. The worse the infection is, the worse the outcome for the foal.

Placentitis can be caused by an undetected uterine infection, faecal contamination and even hairy caterpillars.

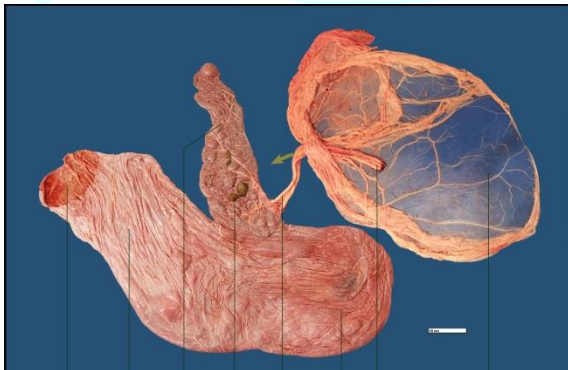
Symptoms to look out for are:

- **discharge from the vulva**
- **premature udder development**
- **dripping milk**

Although, if you wait long enough to see these symptoms it may be too late.

Regular scans by your vet will identify an infected placenta and antibiotics/anti-inflammatory drugs should control the infection. The foal may also need antibiotics in order to survive.

Healthy placenta



Infected placenta



Image from
<https://loriequinesection.blogspot.com/2019/05/fetal-placental-circulation-and.html>

Image courtesy of Becky Hendriks

Uterine torsion

This condition is quite rare but can happen. It often happens when the mare rolls or the foal moves vigorously. The uterus/foal rotates relative to the mare's body. This causes a twist in



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the uterus and strain on the broad ligaments. If the mare starts exhibiting pain or signs of colic in her 3rd trimester it's important to have her checked by a vet. It is generally considered life threatening and will require veterinary intervention.

Prepubic tendon rupture (PPT)



Another condition to be aware of. In this case the ligaments holding the abdominal wall in place rupture. This hole allows internal organs to move through the hole. As the condition progresses the hole enlarges and more organs can start shifting towards the hole. This causes major stress on the mare and is life threatening.

If caught early a sling or bandage can be applied to hold the abdominal wall in place, slowing the progression.



Reference and image:

<https://aaep.org/sites/default/files/issues/proceedings-07proceedings-z9100107000293.pdf>

It is more common in older mares and in the later stages of gestation. Signs of PPT rupture include: **pain**, reluctance to lie down, **colic**, **abnormal abdominal swelling** especially around the udders and **blood** on the teats. While it is rare, PPT is an emergency and a vet should be called immediately.

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Normal presentation

The normal presentation is a white bag with 2 feet inside. One foot will be slightly in front of the other. A few inches behind that will be the nose. The bag should break, releasing the waters. The entire birth should be over in around 20 minutes!

If this doesn't happen you might need to call a vet for help. If the bag doesn't break naturally, break it yourself.

Generally you shouldn't intervene (or pull the foal) unless you think the mare is struggling, or it has taken longer than 20 minutes.

Red bag = emergency

Another problem that can occur during birth is called a red bag. This is where the placenta has detached from the uterus too early, and has been delivered first. This is a problem because the foal is being deprived of oxygen. It is vital that you are present at the birth so you can pull the foal out as fast as possible. Cut through the placenta (it will be tough), find the foals feet and get it out.

You also need to monitor the foal after the birth to check for signs of oxygen deprivation.

Normal presentation



Red bag



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Dystocia (incorrect presentation of the foal)

There are many types of dystocia (unfortunately). Sometimes there may only be one foot. Sometimes two feet but no nose. Sometimes a nose and no feet.

In many of these cases the procedure to correct the problem is to push the foal back in a bit, and then reach in and manually help the foal into position. You can stand the mare facing downhill to use gravity to help push the foal back in as well.

It's also worth having a vet on standby in case you aren't able to correct the foal yourself.

As this is not a veterinary course we won't delve too deep into these problems, but you can do a 3 day course with highly qualified vets at places like Goulburn Valley Equine Hospital Courses. They will cover just about everything you need to know.

The common theme with **all** these problems is **early detection**. Pay close attention to your mare and get to know what "normal" is. Being present at the birth is vital to help correct any problems that may occur. Early intervention often has a successful outcome.

If in doubt, call a VET!

Further reading:

<https://www.rossdales.com/assets/files/Dystocia-an-equine-emergency.pdf>

<http://www.sconequinehospital.com.au/equine-health-articles/foaling>

<https://vetmed.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/13.-Update-on-Equine-Placentitis-in-Mares.pdf>

http://vetfolio-vetstreet.s3.amazonaws.com/5f/772fb02e6411e29e50005056ad4736/file/PV1212_Yorke_CE.pdf

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/eve.12922>

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/horses/facts/placenta.htm>

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