



FOALS AND FOALING SOME USEFUL FACTS, FIGURES AND

Before Foaling

Pregnancy diagnosis; at 6-9 months of pregnancy: by palpation (preferably) or urine/blood test. An earlier test in the first 3 months of pregnancy for example; while at stud the previous season, does not guarantee a foal for the foaling year! Foetal reabsorption is a common phenomenon in the horse.

Feeding; Good balanced diet necessary: avoid producing over or underweight mares: some mares require supplementation in the last third of pregnancy depending on individual and time of year/available grazing. Add calcium to diet in the last 4 months of pregnancy e.g. limestone flour 1-2 tablespoons a day plus vitamin/mineral supplement e.g. Equivite.

Worm regularly

Attend to routine dentistry

Exercise; Keep mare exercised and fit throughout pregnancy according to age, shape, stage of pregnancy and condition. Avoid violent exercise after the sixth month of pregnancy. Avoid turning pregnant mares out with aggressive male horses.

Ensure as high immunity in foal as possible by moving mare to foaling premises and vaccinating mare if possible 6-8 weeks before foaling. This improves quality of colostrum.

Select place for foaling; in or out?

In – Closer supervision but need for high standard of hygiene.

Out – More natural but difficult to watch mare.

Foaling box; should be as large as possible and well strawed: projections from walls are dangerous; board up under mangers; and use anti-cast devices.

Foaling paddock: Should have adequate shelter; avoid horsesick pasture; avoid ponds, streams etc. Good fencing is important. Avoid overcrowded pasture.

Pregnancy length; Average is 340 days BUT THERE IS A WIDE NORMAL RANGE approximately 320 – 366 days i.e. 10¹/₂ - 12 months. Some mares may even foal normally outside these time limits. The normal range for a donkey is 365 – 385 days.

Premature foals:

born at less than 300 days will not usually survive,

born at 300 – 310 days a few survive with careful and intensive management,

born at 310 – 320 days are regarded as immature, many will survive with modern care.

Dysmature foals have all the appearance of premature foals, underdevelopment etc. although they have a normal or even extended pregnancy period.

Pregnancy length is therefore very variable in the mare. Foals tend to be born when they are ready and not before! Foetal oversize is not a characteristic of overdue foals when compared with other species.

For these reasons inducing foals is not commonly undertaken as it is impossible to determine their state of readiness or viability.

At Foaling

Signs of foaling: not all that dependable!

Sign	Avg Time Before Birth	Range
Bagging up	10 days	2–21 days
Running milk	At birth	Birth –10 days
Wax on teats	3 days	Birth – 6 days
Vulval Lengthening	24 hrs	24–48 hours
Slackening pelvic Ligaments	24 hrs	24–48 hours
Steaming up	30 mins	10 mins–2 days

Other methods:

- A) **Milk test** Mares' milk changes in the majority of mares in the last 24 hrs before foaling. This is a simple test for change in salt levels. One needs to milk the mare though (not always easy). This test is not however 100% reliable.
- B) **B) Foaling alarms**; 3 types:
- Detect temperature rise and steaming up.
 - Detect noise and restlessness (typical baby alarm available commercially).
 - Detect passage of foal "FOALALERT".

All of these can be combined with CCTV which may be hired, this reduces human presence and allows observation from a distance.

All systems rely on radio technology and are not fool proof. They are not a substitute for good observation and general management.

FIRST STAGE OF BIRTH – Steaming up to breaking of waters. This lasts from 10 minutes to 2 days although an average is 30 minutes. Cut stitched mares now (if not already done) – preferable to do this around 300 days of pregnancy. Bandage tail with a clean bandage.

RECORD TIMES AS THEY OCCUR.

SECOND STAGE OF BIRTH - breaking water to hips through pelvis. This takes 5 – 60 minutes, average of 30 minutes.

Yellow membrane should appear at vulva within 10 minutes of waters breaking. If this does not occur or a red membrane appears or the whole business takes more than 60 minutes; call veterinary assistance as an emergency. Second stage is the process of actual birth; the moment of birth is that when the foals hips pass through the mothers pelvis.

THIRD STAGE OF BIRTH – birth to passing of placental membranes. This takes 20 minutes – 12 hours, average of 12 hours. If retained call the veterinary surgeon. Clean membranes from foal's muzzle, which should breathe almost immediately. Allow mares to rest and leave cord alone, there is a natural mechanism for rupture.

Birth to breaking cord is 5 – 15 minutes. Treat stump with antibiotic.

Foals should stand in 20 – 100 minutes and suck in 6 – 120 minutes from birth. If foal cannot stand or suck in 2 hours call the veterinary surgeon.

Birthing problems – These are thankfully rare with horses.

When they do occur emergency removal of the mare to a clinic is usually required for correction of the problem under general anaesthesia requiring either :

manipulation

or

caesarean operation

Post foaling check of mare and foal – This is carried out on day one of life.

1) To check mare for pelvic and vaginal damage, haemorrhage etc...

2) Check foal for absorption of colostrum, administer antibiotics and/or tetanus antiserum, examine foal for presence of congenital defects, examine for presence of infectious problems and treat as appropriate. Blood sample for presence of infection.

3) Check placenta (PLEASE KEEP).

After Foaling

Foal disease – Temperature 101.5°F plus indicates fever. The foal is off suck, lethargic, scouring, coughing etc..Foals become ill relatively quickly compared to older horses and often require very prompt treatment.

Pay particular attention to limbs. Lameness is always significant in young foals and should be checked promptly in case of joint ill.

Bent legs of various descriptions may well straighten over the first 2 –3 weeks of life. Always consult your veterinary surgeon, as some require urgent correction by corrective trimming or surgery.

Worm from 4 weeks of age – $\frac{1}{3}$ of a syringe Panomec/ Equalan or $\frac{1}{2}$ a syringe of Panacur.

Vaccinate Tetanus/Herpes from 3 months (2 shots).

Vaccinate influenza from 5 months (2 shots).

Additional dose of Tetanus Antiserum possible at 6 and 12 weeks?

Increase mares feed to cope with milking and maintain high calcium level in diet, nutritional requirements peak at approximately 6 – 12 weeks of lactation.

Commence training at day one. Put foal slip on immediately. Handling the foal extensively at this stage has been shown to dramatically reduce behavioural problems later on. This is known as "bonding".

Trim feet from 4 weeks of age, ensure foot is level and landing straight. Foals with angular limb deformities may need special plastic shoes.

When turning the mare out for the first time after foaling allow mare to exercise herself and calm down before releasing foal.

Remember:

Prevention is better than cure.

Foals become ill surprisingly quickly.

If in doubt phone – we are there to help.