



Foal Limb Deformities

Newborn foals will often have slightly ‘wonky’ legs during the first few days of life and bent legs of various descriptions will generally straighten up over the first few weeks of life.

However there are several types of limb deformity that need veterinary attention and it is good practice to have a ‘foal limb check’ at 7-10 days of life. Early recognition of such deformities means the vast majority can be corrected allowing the horse to go on to be a successful athletes. If ignored, unfortunately these deformities predispose the foal to premature arthritis, degenerative joint disease and lameness in adult life.

There are several types of limb deformities recognized in foals.

- Flexural

Can be congenital due to malpositioning in the uterus or acquires due to disproportionate growth of bone and tendons.

These deformities result in club feet/ballerina syndrome so called as the heel of the foot is elevated off the ground and the foal walks on its toes, or a limb that will not straighten.

- Rotational

Rotation of the limb around the central axis.

- Angular

Deviation of the limb to the outside (Valgus) or inside (Varus).

Treatment for the above deformities varies depending on the severity of the condition. Sometimes corrective farriery is all that is needed, other cases require a combination of corrective farriery and shockwave therapy, and the more severe cases may require surgery.

It is important that treatment is implemented before the growth plates in the foal’s limb close for the treatment to be effective. That is why it is vital that these foals are examined in the early stages of life as often even significant deformities can be corrected.

All foals should have their first foot trim at 4 weeks of age and then regular farriery every 4-6 weeks unless there is a deformity that requires more regular farriery. Neglecting foot care in foals can cause limb deformities such as club feet.



A example of an Angular limb deformity - Valgus



A Flexural deformity known as club foot/ballerina syndrome



A ‘windswept’ foal



A fairly common limb abnormality in foals, “Tendon Laxity”.