

Down Cow Series: Part 4 - Injuries

This is the fourth and final part of our down cow series that we have covered over the last 4 months where we covered care for down cows and the 3 most common reasons - the "3 M's" - milk fever, mastitis, and musculoskeletal (injuries)

Musculoskeletal damage/ injuries can include any injury to muscle, nerve or bone. Depending on the location and severity of the injury this can cause a cow to become "down". Either the animal physically cannot get up, they are too weak, or it is too painful for them. It is important to remember that these injuries can also occur because the animal was down for another reason such as milk fever or mastitis.

Below are a few common injuries that can cause a cow to be "down"

- **Calving paralysis:** an injury that occurs after calving when the calf is large and damages nerve and muscle as it goes out the birth canal.
- **Hip Injuries:** This is typically caused when a cow "splits". Damage can range from torn muscles, dislocated hip joint, and fractures. Reasons why a cow may "split" are poor footing, poor cattle handling, or injuries caused by riding during heats. Weakness from calving or other injuries can increase the chance a cow will "split".
- **Back Injuries:** The most common causes for this are riding behavior during heats or animals getting caught under stall dividers.
- **Broken Bones:** This is more common in younger animals, but can still occur in adults. These are injuries that require IMMEDIATE attention by a veterinarian or euthanasia.

The cause for a down cow needs to be determined ASAP. If you are unsure of the cause, contact your veterinarian. These injuries can be very painful and are a welfare issue if not dealt with immediately.

Injuries can hold a very poor prognosis and can take a long time for an animal to fully recover. If a down animal is determined to have muscle or nerve damage, anti-inflammatories and pain medications should be administered. Two medications that can be utilized are flunixin (Banamine) or dexamethasone. (Note: do not give dexamethasone to pregnant animals). Follow all label instructions or directions with your veterinarian.

All of the previously discussed management tips for a down cow also apply for a cow with injuries. Contact us if you have any questions, or are seeing an increase in injuries on your farm. A high number of injuries or culls related to injuries could indicate a variety of problems on a farm, including issues with footing, facilities, or animal handling.