



- LAMINITIS -

Laminitis – New Thinking

Laminitis is a condition no horse owner ever wants their horse to face. To get the latest insights and tips, we talked to Nicola Menzies-Gow, Professor of Equine Medicine at the Royal Veterinary College London.

What Is Laminitis?

Recent research from the RVC shows that laminitis is more than a hoof problem—it's a systemic condition, meaning it affects the whole body.

Around 90% of cases are endocrinopathic laminitis or hyperinsulinaemia-associated laminitis (HAL). These types are linked to abnormal insulin levels in the blood and often involve conditions like Cushing's Disease (PPID) or Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS).

Other types of laminitis include:

- **Sepsis-related laminitis:** Triggered by serious illness, where the primary condition leads to laminitis.
- **Supporting limb laminitis:** Occurs when one leg bears too much weight for too long, causing oxygen deprivation in the tissues.

How the Endocrine System Plays a Role

For most cases of laminitis, the horse's endocrine system—which controls hormones—is a key factor. Here's how:

EMS (Equine Metabolic Syndrome): This condition causes the horse's body to produce excessive insulin, especially after eating high-starch foods. Over time, these heightened insulin levels make laminitis more likely.

Cushing's Disease (PPID): In this condition, the pituitary gland overproduces hormones, some of which interfere with insulin's role in regulating blood sugar. This creates a domino effect where the body keeps producing more insulin, raising the risk of laminitis.

Many horses with Cushing's aren't diagnosed until later in life, but there seems to be a connection between undiagnosed EMS and laminitis in these cases. Researchers are exploring this link further.

Managing Hormonal Issues

The good news is that you can manage these conditions with a combination of medication and dietary adjustments. Each horse is unique, so their care plan should match their individual needs, whether they're overweight, underweight, or somewhere in between.



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While you can't eliminate the risk of laminitis entirely for horses with these conditions, proactive care makes a huge difference. Here's what to focus on:

Stick to a Fibre-First Diet: Starch and cereals break down into sugar, which quickly spikes insulin levels. Instead, opt for fibre-rich feeds like Barastoc Fibre-Beet Mash or Speedi-Beet, which are low in sugar and starch. Pair these with long-fibre sources like hay and a good-quality, low-sugar balancer to create a well-rounded diet.

Support Underweight Horses: If your horse needs more calories, add healthy fats like liquid oil or cooked linseed to their meals.

Watch Out During Autumn and Spring

Grass management is critical during the high-risk seasons of autumn and spring. These periods can test your skills, but careful planning can help:

Limit Grazing Time: Reduce how long your horse is turned out and control the size of their grazing area.

Observe Grass Growth: Look at the areas your horse avoids eating. Those untouched spots often reveal how much grass—and sugar—your horse has consumed elsewhere. Keep in mind that sugar levels in grass are highest during growth periods.

Work as a Team

With guidance from your vet or a qualified nutritionist, you can create a customized management plan that reduces the risk of laminitis. With the right approach and support, you can keep your horse healthy, happy, and thriving.

