

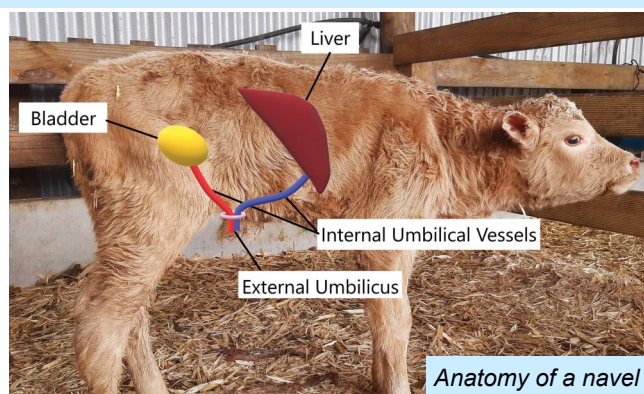
- 2 most common navel issues
- Calf enrichment
- An interesting case of a gut malformation in a 2d old calf

Navel Issues

Issue 2, 2024

With many people having a few pens full of calves already, soon you'll see our teams out and about debudding. We check every calves navel and see the same common issue every year— **navel infections**. This year we'd love not to have to treat any! Treatment costs you time and money and can set the calf back.

What is the navel? The navel is the hole in the body wall that the umbilical cord enters through. This supplies the calf all its nutrients while in the uterus so contains blood vessels and other important structures that can act like a highway for bacteria.



Anatomy of a navel



Why are navel infections so bad? Navel infections are serious and can kill calves. Until the navel is dry, the vessels of the umbilicus are pipes which act as a gateway for bacteria to get straight into the calf's bloodstream. This can result in liver infections, joint ill, brain abscesses and more. Infection around the navel cord itself causes it to thicken and leads to abscess formation.

Prevention:

- Frequent calf pickup - get them off the mud ASAP!
- Wash and disinfect your calf trailer daily - this can be a breeding ground for bacteria!
- Ensure the entire navel is doused in a 10% iodine spray (spirit based).
- Continue spraying navels until they have shriveled up and are dry - on average this takes 5 days.
- Don't over stock your calf pens - measure them 1.5m² / calf.



How to identify navel infections:

- A swollen, distended navel which will often have pus.
- Calves that won't drink or are looking off colour.
- Swollen joints—remember bacteria can spread via the blood!
- Strange behavior—circling, shaking, constantly looking up—this tells us there is an infection in the brain or spine.
- A thickened cord inside the navel (larger than your pinky finger)
- Hard lumps inside the navel cord
- Heat or pain around the navel



Navel Ill Treatment:

At least 4-5 days of an appropriate antibiotic and a one off anti-inflammatory injection. Call us to discuss.

Navel Abscesses: If a pus filled abscess forms it might need drained but do not do this without veterinary consultation! Hernias can look very similar but the guts will spill out (see next page!)



The look-alike– umbilical hernias

Hernias appear as large, soft, fluid-feeling swellings below the navel. They are caused when the calves body wall hasn't closed over properly during development. This allows space for abdominal fat and occasionally a loop of intestines to pop out forming a pouch. An umbilical hernia differs from an abscess as the swelling can be pushed back inside the abdomen.

- Small hernias (<3.5cm long) are generally not an issue, and will heal with little intervention. Recheck at weaning!
- Larger hernias (over 3.5cm long) are more of an issue, with a chance of a section of gut getting trapped. If this went untreated it will cause death.
We recommend operating on these calves.

As hernias are inherited we would recommend that any calves with hernias are not bred from. Identification systems such as 'H' tags are a simple way to identify any cows that have had a hernia at breeding time.



Caution! Do NOT try lance/ drain a hernia!



Enrichment for calves

Why? Just like any young animal, calves have a natural curiosity and playfulness. Calves engaged with toys/entertainment are also less likely to exhibit harmful behaviors like sucking/biting or doing their best to destroy the calf pen. This is important in contributing to better overall calf health.

How? You don't have to spend lots of money on toys! Have a **flax plant** in the garden? Cut some pieces off and tie around gates. Old kids toys? Put them on a rope in a pen so calves can headbutt them instead of you!

Caution: Toys should not be spread between pens without thorough disinfection as they can spread diseases!

Case of the week– gut stricture in a newborn calf



This calf was born big and healthy and appeared to be a real "winner" at its first feed. However by its 2nd feed her enthusiasm had dropped and by the 3rd feed the calf was down and not drinking at all with a very swollen belly. Her heart rate was very high (indicating discomfort) and there was meconium (sticky baby poo) in its rectum. The calf's owners had never seen her poo so we suspected there was probably a blockage somewhere in her guts! She was initially treated for a meconium impaction (a severe type of constipation) however she continued to deteriorate and was euthanized.

Post mortem findings: a narrow malformed area in the guts was found confirming that the cause of her illness was insufficient development of this section of the gut! This prevented any food passing through the guts and explains why she was so full.

This is a rare genetic condition and occurs in approximately 3/1000 calves. The only treatment is surgery but unfortunately we often see them too late.