**Pink Milk Isn’t Mastitis by Irene Ramsay**

Irene responds to an oft-asked question: My young doe has blood in her milk, why is this happening, is it mastitis?

First off, this isn’t mastitis, it’s usually referred to as ‘pink milk’. Pink milk, in all its shades, is a metabolic disturbance and is usually caused by lack of available blood calcium. Blood in the milk can be a sign that the doe hasn’t enough available blood calcium. Usually this is because she has drained her skeleton to the limit and hasn’t yet started storing more calcium from her feed.

In my experience, most forms of mastitis in goats are also metabolic or traumatic, in which case antibiotics don’t mend them, because they are not caused by bacteria. Even when mastitis is caused by bacteria, antibiotics often don’t work on goats nearly so well as the good old-fashioned remedies goat people and midwives have been using for 1000s of years.

Pink milk can happen any time in lactation if there’s lack of blood calcium for some reason, but most usually in the first 3-4 months of lactation, when the goat’s skeleton is at its most drained of calcium.

It can also happen, along with thickening udder tissue, if the doe needs a bit more cobalt to process the calcium. My experience. [Extra cobalt can be by bolus, 1% solution or using B12 injections.] The ideal treatment for pink milk, in my experience, is 1 tablespoon of limewater twice daily until the milk shows no residue at the bottom of the container after standing for an hour or two. However, trying to find limewater these days is pretty hopeless. The simplest way to treat it is to give the doe 1 teaspoon dolomite (powder) daily, mixed in the ration.

You can also offer the doe one pint of her own milk after each milking, if she’ll take it. This helps the calcium level, too. It’s tempting to let them drink more than that, but from personal experience, I’ve found more than a pint at a time gives some goats acidosis, so I’m stingy with it.

Keep up the dolomite for about a month after the pink stops. Some stop right away, some take several days. It’s a waste of effort to give more than 1 teaspoon a day as that’s about the limit the body will absorb efficiently in 24-hours.

Goats that are normally on a high calcium diet are less efficient at absorbing calcium than those with less diet calcium. If the diet is calcium-rich (more than 2:1 ration with phosphorus) use DCP (di-calcium phosphate) instead, dose by weight on the container. It’s used for bitches mostly.

You need to consider whether the low blood calcium level could be due to a cal:phos imbalance. If the phosphorus isn’t high enough, you can give yeast instead of dolomite, same dose of 1 teaspoon daily.

Deficiency in copper and/or cobalt may also affect the blood calcium levels, as both minerals a required in minute quantities to absorb diet calcium into the system.

The milk won’t hurt the kids. The reason you have the blood in it, is that milk is made by processing blood, and the manufacturing process is not quite up to par, so some of the blood is coming through unprocessed. You can use it yourself, if you want to. After the milk has stood for a while wherever you cool it, the pink material sinks to the bottom, so you can pour off the top level and use it without having pink colour/blood spots. The bottom layer can prove quite thick, and is slightly salty to taste.

How long does your young doe have to go between the night milking and the next morning? Try and make her 3 milkings 8 hours apart, or even go to 4 milkings 6 hours apart. Yeah, it’s tiring, but I’ve had to do it. In another month, her udder will have adjusted better to the amount it has to carry, and you can drop back to twice daily. My experience. And you’ll be pleased to know, it shouldn’t happen her next lactation, she’ll be an old hand by then.

The clumpy bits you can get from pink milk – irregularly shaped pieces of tissue? These also commonly occur in traumatic damage to the udder, including some forms of mastitis. It’s the damaged tissue coming away and exiting through the teat sphincter. This is a good sign as it shows healing is taking place. The damaged tissue has been sloughed off by new healthy tissue. Just like if you graze or cut yourself, the damaged surface finally comes off when healing has taken place underneath.

Wormy solid, cheese-like milk you may squeeze out of an unhappy udder – and sometimes out of a perfectly healthy udder if the butterfat is high: these worms generally come out at the start of milking. The more solid part of the milk has sunk to the bottom of the milk reservoir by gravity, so it has to come out first, and what has sat in the teat canal since the last milking has simply congealed. If it is followed by normal milk, it is NOT disease, just maybe you should milk oftener or test the butterfat and solids-not-fat to ease your mind. Where the solid material in the milk is more like fine grit, most usually called sub-clinical mastitis, this in my experience is an indication of cobalt deficiency. You can’t always feel this coming out, you just see it in the strainer or strip cup. You can also find more solid material at the bottom of milk that’s been standing a while. This generally happens when a doe is starting to dry off. She’s cut down the volume of liquid being produced but hasn’t yet adjusted the butterfat and solids-not-fat content, so it’s thicker. Makes good yoghurt.

If you find such solid material at the bottom of milk from a doe in full milk, her intake of calcium is too high for her needs. If I’ve been giving dolomite to mine over the kidding and early lactation period because of very lush pasture, or no pasture at all (drought), when I see the solids at the bottom after the milk’s been standing, I know it’s time to stop the dolomite till next time it’s needed.