

Twin Lamb Disease

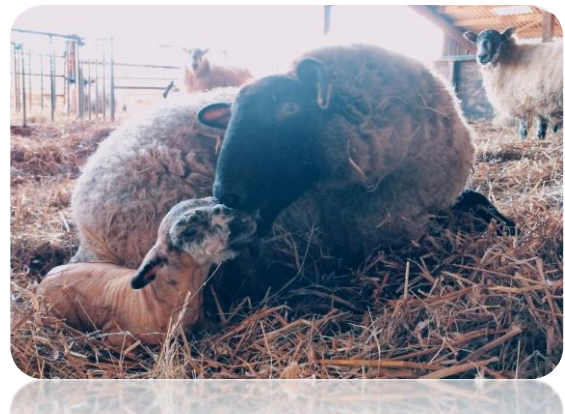
Ovine pregnancy toxaemia (OPT), or 'twin lamb disease', is caused by an imbalance in energy intake by the ewe during late pregnancy, and the rising energy demands of the growing foetuses.

Ewes at risk for developing OPT typically:

- Are in late pregnancy
- Carry multiple lambs
- Are under- or over-conditioned
- Lack appropriate energy levels in their diet
- Have other underlying health conditions (e.g. teeth problems, lameness, fluke)

The negative energy balance causes a rapid breakdown of the ewe's body fat reserves and low blood glucose levels, leading to an unfavourable state of metabolic acidosis. The typical – and sometimes very subtle! – clinical signs include:

- Separation from the rest of the flock
- Anorexia
- Blindness
- Dullness, recumbency, teeth grinding
- Fine muscle spasms of the face
- Salivating
- Hypersensitivity
- Head pressing, star-gazing, excessive drinking, staggering, panting



If left untreated, OPT has a poor prognosis for both ewe and lamb vitality and survival. As 1 in 5 ewes with OPT also suffers from hypocalcaemia ('milk fever'), treatment is aimed at restoring both energy and calcium levels by oral administration of propylene glycol or glycerol ('twin lamb drench') and subcutaneous injections of calcium.

Sick ewes should be isolated with access to good roughage and concentrates. With the evidence that OPT is a painful condition, pain relief is also indicated.

In severe cases, a caesarean section might be indicated in an attempt to save the ewe and/or lambs.

Remember also that clinical cases are the tip of the iceberg: for every case, there will be many more ewes whose milk & colostrum quality and mothering ability will be reduced.

As with most disease, prevention of OPT is better than cure.

If you suspect a ewe might have twin lamb disease, please speak to your vet about treatment options, and possibilities to improve the management of your late-pregnant ewes in the future!