



# Northwest Veterinary Associates, Inc.

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## A TWISTED TALE

Have you ever operated a piece of equipment that had some sort of problem, like a broken shifter knob or a chronically soft or badly worn tire? Usually, we learn to compensate and are able to 'make do' knowing that someday we need to fix the problem. For example, my mountain bike's shifting mechanism needs adjusting, and I remember the problem only when I am riding and instantly forget it as soon as I park the bike in the garage.

It seems that we operate in a similar pattern when dealing with cow health issues- we 'make excuses' why we are having issues with a specific health event. Take DAs as an example. Every late winter/early spring we see an uptick in the number of displaced abomasums we are called to examine and repair in the practice. In many cases, over time, the problem subsides, and we continue on. But if we want to take a deeper dive into what causes these stomach disorders, we may be able to impact the incidence of this disease.

First, what is a reasonable alarm level of DAs for fresh cows? An achievable goal is to have <3% DAs in fresh cows within a month timeframe. Well-managed farms report DA incidence of <1% during the month following calving. Monitoring related diseases can offer insight into the overall health of fresh cows. Here are some basic alarm levels for related diseases:

**Metritis** >15% **Mastitis** >5% **Retained placentas** >5% **Ketosis** >15%

**Hypocalcemia (milk fever)** Clinical down cows => 5% Subclinical => 30%

Cows with high ketone levels in their blood are 7-8 times more likely to develop a DA. Cows with milk fever are 3-5 times more likely to develop a DA. Cows with a protein/fat inversion, or protein/fat ratio less than 0.72 were 8 times more likely to twist.

The economic loss of DAs range from \$430-\$640 depending on the age of the cow. If the cow responds poorly to treatment, these costs, of course, increase substantially. The primary drivers of these losses are milk production losses and treatment costs.

In addition to controlling these diseases that increase the probability of developing a DA, several other management areas have direct or indirect connections to the incidence of twisted stomachs. Considering these factors may give you insights on where to focus your attention.

- Use of automated health monitoring systems for **early diagnosis of related diseases** (rumination collars)
- Use of anionic salts during the dry period to **minimize the occurrence of milk fever**
- Test and treat strategies to **monitor ketosis**
- **Routine TMR audits** including particle length, consistency of the delivered diet, feeding routine and bunk management.



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- **Cow comfort assessments** including stocking densities of different periods of lactation, bunk space, access to water, stall design, comfortable and sanitary bedding material, and heat abatement.
- Systems of **managing early lactation cows** in fresh pens
- **Body condition scoring** of cows at dry-off, calving, peak milk and mid-lactation

We would be glad to help you troubleshoot your situation if you are concerned with the number of DAs you are seeing in your herd. Preventing disease is ALWAYS more profitable than treatment. Repairing DAs is like fixing flat tires. It allows the cow to continue her productive life but she could travel more miles if she never had the flat!

**Welcome Spring!**

