

## Step 1: Why is she down?

Milk fever and grass staggers are not the only things that result in a cow not being able to get up. Other conditions may include:

- Nitrate poisoning
- Dislocated hip
- Broken leg
- Mastitis
- Calving paralysis
- A 'sick' cow

If you suspect any of the above conditions call your vet.



### Clinical signs of milk fever (low calcium) include:

- Dull /unresponsive / slow to respond cow
- Staggering
- Tremors
- Down cow
- S-shaped bend in neck
- Dry muzzle
- Constipated
- Low temperature

### Clinical signs of grass staggers (low magnesium) include:

- Hyper-excitability
- Muscle tremors
- Excessive licking of metal and dirt
- Staggering
- Tremors
- Down cow
- Seizures

## Step 2: Treat the milk fever or grass staggers

### a. Ensure cow is sitting upright

If the cow is lying on her side, the first thing you should do is to sit her up into an upright position. Cows on their side can regurgitate and inhale their stomach contents, which can be fatal.

- b. Start with a Calpromag bag slowly in the vein** (rapid administration of calcium IV can result in death). Preferably use a neck vein. If you are not confident you know how to do this, ask your vet to show you. If you are unable to use the neck vein, you can place a bag under the skin. However if the cow has milk fever, she is also likely to be cold and this may prevent absorption and reduce effectiveness of treatment. **Warming the bag before placing under the skin will help with absorption.**

Calpromag contains both calcium and magnesium and will treat both grass staggers and milk fever. You should notice a response to treatment shortly after giving the treatment:

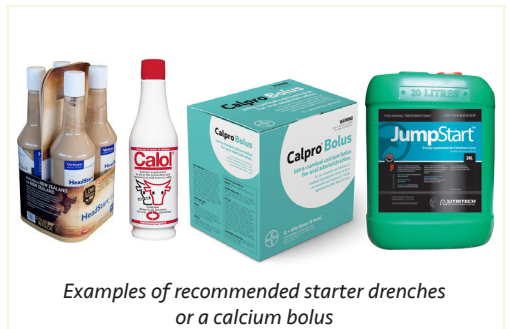
- Beading of moisture on the muzzle
- Increased alertness
- Burping
- Tremors



### c. Give a Calprobolus or an oral calcium drench

Once the cow is sitting upright and can swallow, it is important to give her a Calprobolus or an oral calcium drench immediately. The treatment given in the vein will only last a few hours and when it wears off, she will go down again if she hasn't received a chaser of oral calcium after her IV treatment. A second Calprobolus or oral calcium drench should be repeated 12 hours later.

*Cows with milk fever will be cold due to reduced blood circulation combined with the cold ground. Warming them up is part of getting them up quicker. Moving them if they don't immediately respond to the IV calcium will lead to a much better chance of recovery.*



Examples of recommended starter drenches or a calcium bolus

### Step 3: Monitor the cow's response to treatment and check for other problems

- Remember that a down cow may have more than one problem
- If the primary reason for the cow going down is milk fever or grass staggers (due to low calcium or magnesium levels), she should respond to this treatment
- If she is responding to treatment but struggling to get up, assist her with a chest rope/strap and hip-lifters (at this point it is a good idea to check her for mastitis if safe to do so)

If the cow is not up and eating within 3 hours of IV calcium, call the vet (cows that are down for more than 3 hours are at risk of developing downer cow syndrome).



### Step 4: Follow up treatment and nursing care

#### a. Even if your cow has successfully responded to treatment, she requires follow up care

- ✓ Repeat the oral calcium drench 12h later
- ✓ Check her for mastitis when she comes into the shed
- ✓ Monitor her for any signs of laboured breathing or discharge from the nose. Call the vet if you notice either of these signs

#### b. If you have a downer cow, she will require nursing

(A downer cow is a cow that doesn't respond to initial treatments and is down for more than 12h)

- ✓ Give her an injection of Metacam in the vein or under the skin
- ✓ Ensure that she ALWAYS has easy access to food (silage/hay/ PKE) and water so that she isn't tempted to crawl
- ✓ Ensure that she gets a twice daily dose of causmag and limeflour
- ✓ Keep her protected from the elements in a barn and/or sit her on soft bedding and put a cover on her
- ✓ Lift her with a chest rope/strap and hip-lifters, 3 times a day, allowing her to stand for at least 10 minutes
- ✓ Check her for mastitis daily



### Other little pearls:

- The longer the cow is down, the less likely it is that she will recover and get up. If a cow has been down for 24 hours or longer the chances of her recovering are very low
- There are some circumstances where giving a Calprobolus or an oral calcium drench is impossible or unsafe. In these situations the next best alternative is to give the cow a calpromag bag under the skin
- Do NOT give two bags in the vein straight after each other. An overdose of calcium or magnesium will kill the cow
- Cows that are down with milk fever are at risk of inhaling their gut contents and developing pneumonia. It is important that cows who are treated for milk fever are monitored for respiratory illness.



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