

Pregnancy Toxemia (Twin Lamb Disease / Ketosis)

What you need to know to keep your girls healthy.

Pregnancy toxemia is a serious metabolic disorder of ruminants that occurs during the **last 2 to 4 weeks of pregnancy**. It is most common in animals carrying multiple babies (twins or triplets), as they have higher energy demands than their bodies can keep up with.

Why Does It Happen?

In late pregnancy, 80% of fetal growth occurs. If a doe or ewe cannot eat enough high-quality calories to power both herself and her growing babies, she begins to break down her own body fat too rapidly.

This process creates **ketones**, which are toxic to the brain in high amounts. Essentially, the animal is in a state of "negative energy balance"—she is burning fuel faster than she can consume it.

Warning Signs to Watch For

Early detection is the difference between life and death. Watch your herd closely for these stages:

- **Early Signs:** Lagging behind the herd, appearing "dreamy" or dull, and a decreased interest in grain or treats.
- **Progressing Signs:** Swelling in the lower legs (pitting edema), "stargazing" (holding the head up and back), and walking unsteadily.
- **Advanced Signs:** Inability to stand, sweet-smelling breath (like nail polish remover), seizures, or coma.

Pro-Tip: If you have an overweight doe or ewe, **do not** put her on a diet during late pregnancy. This will trigger the fat-burning process and cause the very disease you are trying to avoid!

Risk Factors: Who is Most at Risk?

Risk Category	Why?
Multiple Fetuses	More babies mean more energy sucked away from the mother.
Overweight (Fat) Animals	Fat takes up space in the abdomen, leaving less room for the stomach to expand with food.
Underweight (Thin) Animals	They have no energy reserves to pull from when demands increase.
Stress	Sudden weather changes, transport, or predator scares can cause an animal to stop eating.

Prevention: The Best Medicine

Preventing toxemia is much easier (and cheaper) than treating it.

1. **Nutrition Boost:** Gradually increase high-quality grain and the best alfalfa hay during the last month of pregnancy.
2. **Space to Move:** Encourage exercise. Place water and hay at opposite ends of the pen so they have to walk.
3. **Stress Management:** Avoid moving or hauling animals in the final month of pregnancy.
4. **Check the Vitals:** If an animal stops eating, even for one meal, it is a **veterinary emergency**.

What to Do if You Suspect Toxemia

1. **Call your vet immediately.** Time is of the essence.
2. **Ketone Strips:** You can use human urine test strips (available at pharmacies) to check the animal's urine for ketones.

3. **Oral Energy:** Your vet may recommend drenching with **Propylene Glycol** or a glucose drench to provide an immediate sugar spike.
4. **Induction:** In severe cases, the only way to save the mother is to deliver the kids/lambs early via induction or C-section.

