

## Urinary Obstruction in Small Ruminants

Many sheep and goat owners have questions when it comes to feeding and management. In particular, owners tend to have questions about how to manage bucks or wethers such that they can lessen the chance of their animal developing urinary tract stones. While there is no tried-and-true method to ensure that a goat or sheep will never become blocked, there are some steps an owner can take to try to reduce the risk. If the goat is newborn, one recommendation is to try to delay castration until the buck is 6-8 months old.

This will allow the urethral diameter to become larger, possibly preventing relatively small calculi from causing a large problem. If the urethra is large enough, the goat may be able to pass smaller calculi. For many owners, however, waiting this long to castrate the buck poses some management issues. Because young male goats tend to be rather precocious, some owners cannot weather the behavioral changes associated with the maturing buck.

Another concern for owners is that the young buck will be able to breed with females in the herd, even at such a young age. If an owner decides to prolong castration, they should be aware that they will need to make some management changes to avoid accidental breeding in the herd. Once the animal has been castrated, it is important to try to keep grain feeding to a minimum. If there is adequate hay and grass access, it may not be necessary to supplement with grain at all. Grain feeding in wethers and bucks has been associated with some types of urinary tract calculi, which can eventually lead to a life-threatening situation.

Again, this feeding strategy could pose management challenges for a herd that has pregnant or lactating animals, as they will most likely require some sort of grain supplementation. High calcium-containing pastures like clover or alfalfa can also be high in other minerals that create the foundation for calculi formation. Access to water and water intake is another factor to consider in preventing calculi formation. It is imperative that the animal have access to clean, fresh water at all times, and that it be in an area where there is access for all animals. In the winter, it may be necessary to

provide a water heater. Water intake can be improved by spraying the hay with a saltwater solution, and by providing a plain white salt block in addition to a red trace mineral block.

While there is no one thing that can be done to guarantee that a buck or wether will not become blocked, there are some management and feeding steps that can be taken. If a sheep or goat does become blocked, it can be very stressful for the owner, and extremely painful for the animal. If you observe an animal to be vocalizing, posturing to urinate, appearing bloated, and/or recumbent, going off feed or separating itself from the herd, please contact the office immediately. Most of the time, not all of these signs are observed all at once. While there are medical treatments that can help relieve the blockage, most cases require surgical intervention in order to save the animal's life.