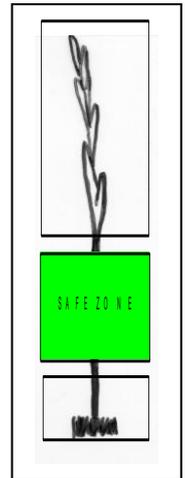


Paddock Card - Rye Grass Staggers



Cause: Endophyte Fungus at base of pasture and seed heads taken in by animal. A neurotoxin is produced that affects the nervous system.

- **When:** mid/late Summer till Autumn, or similar conditions.
- **Most common when grass is dried up (as in drought) and new grass is coming away after rain.**
- **Where:** Potentially wherever pasture has been sown with grass seeds that have 'endophytes'. (Endophytes have been put into some grass seeds to deter insect attack and increase growth rates)
- **Young, growing animals seem to be the ones most prone to RGS**



PREVENTION OF RYE GRASS STAGGERS (RGS)

- ✓ Establish non Rye grass pastures
- ✓ Graze on endophyte-free pasture
- ✓ If you decide to re-sow, **insist** on endophyte-free seed.
- ✓ Good pasture management: *no seed heads or close-to-ground grazing*



SIGNS OF RYEGRASS STAGGERS (progressively)

- Fine tremors of head, nodding, excitability
- Loss of coordination, stilted gait
- Loss of balance, falling
- Inability to rise

MANAGEMENT OF AFFECTED ALPACA

- **TAKE OFF** pasture and into a yard with a 'buddy' for company
- **FEED** only "old" paddock hay and pellets (**hard feed**) until conditions improve.

Generally the signs disappear anywhere from between 24 hours to 3-4 weeks, depending on the amount of toxin ingested before being taken off the pasture. Permanent nervous damage may be present. *The animal does not recover if it is being kept on the pasture that is causing the condition. It is highly likely that the symptoms will become more severe.*

ADDITIONAL MANAGEMENT

- Place in quiet environment
- Give Ketol if doesn't eat
- Vitamin B1 injections
- Magnesium oxide/sulphate drench

How to diagnose RGS

- Observation of animals
- Identification of Symptoms

Ask yourself - Do climate and time of the year produce ideal conditions for RGS to develop?

COMPLICATIONS

- Tremors and excitement can cause overheating
- Possible permanent brain & nerve damage
- Injury from falling, pressure sores
- Death from misadventure due to excitability, lack of coordination and balance problems
- Can affect growth rate and hormonal production

OTHER POINTS TO NOTE

- Animals with RGS should be handled as little as possible, they will over-react to any stimulus.
- **Don't** shear, **don't** take to shows
- Check alpacas for re-occurrence of signs when put back on pasture
- It is possible to select for resistance to RGS in sheep. This may be the case in camelids.
- **Freshly cut hay from affected paddocks is still toxic!**
- Signs of RGS do not seem to be exclusive to rye grass. On occasion other grasses seem to be able to produce similar signs. Treatment as for RGS

NB 'Hypomagnesaemia', commonly referred to as '**grass staggers**' **should not be confused with RGS**. It is characterised by incoordination, hyperexcitability and convulsions, followed by death in 1-12 hours if untreated. Cause: low magnesium levels, but unlikely to occur in stock with supplementary feeding. Magnesium Sulphate (Epsom salts) can be put into staggery animal's water for 'peace of mind' at a rate of 3 grams per litre of water.