



What Is Laminitis?

Laminitis is an inflammatory condition affecting the lamellae, which are the tissues that suspend the coffin bone within the horse's hoof. If the lamellae become severely damaged, they can separate, causing the coffin bone to rotate downward or sink. Affected horses often experience significant pain and lameness. A variety of factors can cause laminitis, including diet, disease, and injury. Based on the cause, laminitis falls into one of three types: endocrinopathic, systemic inflammatory disease, or supporting limb.



Clinical Signs

The clinical signs of laminitis can vary depending on the severity of the condition. Common signs include:

- Lameness or difficulty walking
- Reluctance to move or walk.
- Increased respiratory rate.
- A pronounced digital pulse in the fetlock artery.
- Heat in the hooves.
- A rocked-back stance to shift weight off affected front feet.
- Frequent weight-shifting.

- Frequent lying down or refusal to stand up.

Laminitis can be difficult to identify in the early stages, as some horses show no signs or exhibit only slight lameness.



Diagnosis

If your horse is showing signs of laminitis, your veterinarian will first conduct a thorough physical exam, which includes examining your horse's hooves, checking for heat and a digital pulse, and evaluating his gait. To confirm a diagnosis, your vet will take radiographs to assess the position of the coffin bone and the severity of the damage.



Treatment and Management

The goal of treatment for laminitis is to relieve pain, control inflammation, and prevent further damage to the lamellae. Treatment options might include:

- Pain management with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).
- Cryotherapy that keeps the horse's limb constantly immersed in ice water.
- Corrective shoeing and farriery

techniques such as easing breakover, elevating the heel, and redistributing load.

- Resting the horse to alleviate pressure on the hooves.
- Dietary changes to manage insulin levels and/or reduce the horse's weight.
- Supportive therapy with hoof pads or boots.
- Exercise, if possible, to control insulin levels.



When to Call Your Vet

Contact your veterinarian:

- If your horse shows any of the above-mentioned signs of laminitis.
- If medication and management are no longer controlling your horse's clinical signs.
- If your horse is at high risk of developing laminitis or relapsing. High-risk categories include horses that are obese, insulin resistant, metabolic, or Cushingoid.

It is essential to call a veterinarian as soon as you suspect your horse has laminitis. Early intervention can help prevent the condition from progressing and causing permanent damage to the hooves.