

CRIA NOT FEEDING?

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I've got the milk-em in the morning blues! Hoagy Carmichael's classic lament could well be the theme-song of any alpaca breeder with a cria whose mother will not feed it. There are several possible reasons for this problem:

- No milk - AGALACTIA.
- Sore udder because of infection - MASTITIS.
- Sore udder because of swelling and oedema.
- Mum doesn't want anything to do with bub.
- Mum has forgotten which bub is hers - MISMOTHERING.

Normally, the cria will have struggled to its feet 10 to 20 minutes after birth, and will be looking for its first drink within 45 to 60 minutes. Having sorted out the front end of mum from the back, and her udder from the inside of her thigh, and learned not to go out between her hind legs or under her belly, the cria will suckle for 1 to 3 minutes, and will do this every hour.

If the cria seems to be suckling for 5 minutes or more, or if it is back for seconds every 15 to 30 minutes, or if mum is moving away from it or kicking at it when it comes near her hind end, don't delay - investigate!

No milk – AGALACTIA

The first effort at suckling is an important event for mum and bub. The suckling stimulus should trigger a chain of hormonal events that results in the uterus contracting and expelling the afterbirth, and also causes prolactin release, which prompts production and letdown of milk. When you try to express milk from the teats there may initially be none, but 30 seconds gentle massage and "stripping" should result in a reward of drops or a squirt of milk. Occasionally a teat may still be plugged by a bead of waxy material which is there to keep bad bugs out of the udder and which is normally dislodged by the cria's suckling efforts. Remove any such plugs and try to express milk.

Rarely (and then usually in first-time mums) the hormone mechanism fails to release prolactin and there is no milk production or letdown. This used to signal a prolonged period of hand-rearing the cria with milk replacer, but thanks to a tip from Dr. Geoff Treloar of Wagga there may be a simple solution.

He has been using Motilium (Janssen), a tablet made for treating some types of diarrhoea in humans. It is also used for getting human mothers to produce milk when they have agalactia. Dr. Treloar has been using the drug with success in mares with agalactia, and those of us at Bob Richardson's Farm Day in April saw an alpaca mum that was producing milk after two days treatment.

The dose rate is 1 mg/Kg. given in divided doses night and morning. The drug comes in 10 mg tablets which are crushed and given in a small amount of water as a drench. It is an S4 medication, which means that you need a prescription from your veterinarian to get it from a chemist if your veterinarian doesn't have any in stock, but veterinary wholesalers can get it for your practitioner.

You may have to treat the mum for up to 11 days, but once the bub is getting an adequate milk supply for 48 hours once every hour, and is satisfied after 1 to 2 minutes of suckling - you can probably cease medication. The bub we saw was milky-mouthed with no visible side effects.

Sore udder because of infection – MASTITIS

Very little has been written about mastitis in alpacas, and I know of no published identification of the causal bacteria. Infection will usually involve only one or two of the four quarters of the udder. This/these will be hard, swollen, hot, and very sore. If you do manage to express some milk from the teat it may contain clots or strings, and may even be blood-tinged. What do you do? You take mum's temperature; if it is 39 deg.C or more, this confirms infection, and you call your veterinarian, because your gal needs antibiotics given intramuscularly, and into the gland itself, using a formulation given up the teat canal. Your veterinarian will have his/her antibiotic of choice, based on what works best in your district, but Mamyzin (Boehringer) is a type of Openicillin designed specifically to treat infections of alveolar epithelium, so is especially useful for infections of udders and lungs.

You can help reduce the inflammation by fomenting the affected quarters with a solution of Epsom salts (magnesium sulphate), using 1 teaspoonful dissolved in 600 ml of warm water. Soak a washer or other cloth in this solution and hold it gently on the inflamed quarter, and repeat until the solution loses its warmth. Then try and milk out the unaffected quarters and feed this to the cria, especially in the first 24 hours, to provide antibodies necessary for the cria's health.

Mastitis can recur after subsequent births. To minimise this possibility always give the full course of antibiotics, usually 5 days - even if everything seems normal after 1 or 2 days. Also, you can maximise mum's antibody levels prior to unpacking by giving her a 5-in-1 shot 4 to 6 weeks BEFORE the anticipated unpacking date.

Sore udder because it is swollen and oedematous

Again, this is not common, but will more often affect first-time mums. Her rectal temperature will not be above 39 deg. C, and the udder will be uniformly hot and swollen and sore, rather than there being only one or two quarters affected.

If in doubt, ask your veterinarian to examine her. A course of antibiotics may be prescribed to prevent infection gaining hold, and she may be given an injection of a diuretic to reduce the oedema, and an injection of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory solution to reduce the inflammation.

Alternatively, you can use the warm Epsom salts fomentation described in the previous section, but foment the entire udder. This should reduce the oedema and soreness in 3 to 6 hours, and can be repeated as necessary. Once the soreness has gone, the mum should allow the cria to suckle normally. If the soreness gets worse and the swelling increases, however, infection may have developed, and your veterinarian's help is needed.

Mum doesn't want anything to do with bub

PLEASE NOTE: Alpaca mums are usually one-sided, and will only allow bub to suckle when approached from the right or left side. Therefore, if you are trying to get a mum to allow her new-born to suckle, and she is being unco-operative, try plugging bub in from the other side.

If mum is being steadfastly un-accepting, and there is no sign of soreness of the udder from mastitis or oedema, try one or more of the following:

- a) Rub mum's placenta (afterbirth) over the cria's head and ears, then hold head and ears up to mum's nose and rub the two together. Then let the cria loose at the front of mum and allow it to work its way back towards the udder. Repeat this two or three times if the first attempt is unrewarded.
- b) Anoint the bub's head and ears, and mum's nose, with something that will make the cria's head smell the same as the smell and taste in mum's nose and mouth. I have heard that orangeade works well, but I have found garlic butter to be successful. Other possibilities are liquid seaweed, or dilute molasses. There are numerous possibilities in your pantry, but avoid kerosene, turpentine, curry pastes, or liquid ammonia.

- c) Give mum an injection of 5 to 10 units of oxytocin. You may need your veterinarian to give this, but in the cases I know of it has worked in 1 hour, changing an antisocial critter into a model affectionate and co-operative mum.
- d) Put mum and bub into a pen together and let them work it out. This is the traditional method used for lambs and calves. In my view this method puts additional stress on the mum, and may lead to another problem - WALL-WALKING. Part of the cria's inherent programme for suckling is to look for the milk-bar in the darkest part of mum ie between her hind legs. If mum and the rejected cria are in a dark shed the bub may start working its way along the darker sides of the shed into the darkest corner, looking for milk there, rather than persevering with mum. If your set-up means that mum and bub have to be separated into a yard or pen, rather than being drafted out and then returned to the herd, at least put a companion wether or an expectant friend in with her.

Mum has forgotten which bub is hers – MISMOTHERING

There are two variations of mismothering:

The first is only seen when two or more cria are born on the same day, and the mums are hassled by being moved with the herd to another yard or paddock. Normally the mum and bub will stay close to the birth-spot for several hours, and mum may be reluctant to take her bub out of that paddock for 2 to 3 days. By this time they are well bonded.

If you move mums and bubs around before they are well bonded there is a risk that individual mums will become separated from their bubs in the melee. Subsequently, Mother A may pal up with Baby B, and Mother B will be hunted away, and will not accept Baby A. An alternative is that one or both mums will disown their own offspring.

If this happens, try the orangeade/garlic butter treatment, using a clearly different substance for each pair. If one takes and the other doesn't, use a third substance on the failed pair; do NOT use the successful substance on the unsuccessful pair, or you just might end up back at square one. If nothing works, you will be left with a poddy to rear, and a mental note NOT to move newborn bubs and mums in future.

The other variation of mismothering involves a mum who is only too happy to provide a meal to any of her offspring's friends who come by. We have one gal who has been seen to host two freeloaders as well as her own offspring. Both were bigger and older than Junior, who obviously had to make do with the leavings certainly can explain SOME of the cria who are not putting on weight, even if mum is milking well.

Our overall husbandry solution to this problem is to run a herd of expectant mums in the last 6 weeks of their pregnancy with mums and bubs up to 8 weeks of age, plus a companion wether. If we have to separate an over-generous mum from the freeloaders, we can draft her off with bub and a few expectant friends - plus or minus the wether - for 4 or 5 days, while the freeloaders get used to eating at home. We then return the draftees to the herd and observe closely for any backsliding.