

# Retained Placenta

In the cow, the placenta is made up of numerous button-like structures called cotyledons which are the sites of nutrient transfer from dam to fetus. Normally, the placenta should be expelled from the uterus within an hour or two after calving. If it has not been expelled after 12 hours, it is considered *retained*.

Retained placenta is usually attributed to one of the following causes:

- Early calving - 5 or more days before the normal due date;
- A reproductive tract infection causing fever, abortion or stillbirth;
- Dietary deficiency of vitamin A (or its precursor, beta-carotene), vitamin E, selenium or iodine;
- High body [condition score](#) at calving (4+) which may be related to poor uterine muscle tone;
- Uterine contractions which are too weak to expel the cotyledons from their attachment sites, the uterine caruncles. Weak contractions may be related to low blood calcium (hypocalcemia) or subclinical [milk fever](#).

Treatment of retained placenta is controversial. Most veterinarians recommend waiting 1 to 3 days before attempting to clean a cow manually, if at all. Some recommend parenteral (IV, IM, SC) antibiotics, few favour intrauterine boluses.

for more information:

[Fresh Cow Problems: How to control them](#), *Hoard's Dairyman Books*