

## Types of crooked legs in foals

### Quick facts

- Generally, leg deformities in foals have a good outcome if you start treatment early.
- If you leave moderate to severe cases untreated, crippling problems will occur as the foal matures.
- Pain associated with crippling problems make these horse unrideable.

### Tendon laxity

Tendon laxity refers to a disorder that causes weak flexor tendons. It's common in newborn foals, especially premature foals. This condition usually fixes itself with controlled exercise. Controlled exercise includes stretching the muscle-tendon unit, which can include:

- Trimming the feet.
- Bandaging to promote relaxation.
- Oxytetracycline to relax the muscle.

A small bandage can help the limb if it's hitting the ground. Avoid using a heavy support bandage in this case as it will worsen the condition.

### Ligamentous laxity

Ligamentous laxity refers to a disorder that causes loose ligaments. It's common in newborns but is often self-limiting. You can manually straighten the legs, but weight bearing can cause crookedness.

Controlled exercise will strengthen the ligaments and keep the legs in better alignment.

### Tendon contracture

Tendon contracture refers to a disorder that causes the tendons to be really tight. It can include the following conditions:

- Club feet
- Fetlock contracture
- Carpal contracture

These conditions are a relative difference between tendon length and leg length. Always check foals born with contracture for undershot jaws. This would likely mean there was a problem with the mare iodine levels.

Usually, these conditions occur from premature birth or damage to the growth plate.



X-ray of a foal with leg deformities due to trauma in the growth plate. The bone length is different below the growth plate (yellow lines).

## Treatment

Foals born with contracture should also be checked for undershot jaws, as this would likely indicate problems with iodine levels in the mare. These foals do not respond to treatment as well as other foals. Remember, younger foals respond best to medical treatment, so do not delay treatment.

Surgery may be an option in some cases. Generally, foals less than one year old respond best to surgery. Surgical treatment depends on the site of the contracture.

- If the deformity isn't excessive, club footed foals respond well to cutting the inferior check ligament. The deep flexor tendon may be cut in severe cases.
- Fetlock contracture may require cutting of the inferior and superior check ligaments to allow the superficial and deep flexor tendons to stretch.
- Surgical treatment of carpal contracture is possible but generally reserved for select cases.

## Immature cuboidal bones

Immature cuboidal bones refers to a disorder where the foal's bones aren't solid at birth. It's a dangerous deformity in premature foals. Thus, weight can cause the bones to deform.

Foals must remain lying down or given splints or casts for standing to maintain the bones' normal shape. The bones will solidify over time. As a result, prognosis is good if the bones don't deform. If the bones deform, the condition is hard to correct.

Foals with signs of prematurity should have hock and carpal x-rays taken to make sure this isn't a problem. Swelling or trauma to the growth plate can make one side of the leg grow faster than the other. In foals, the most common version leads to legs that turn out at the front knee.

## Treatment

This condition will often fix itself over time. But hoof trimming and controlled exercise help prevent other problems. Consider periosteal stripping for carpal versions in severe cases or if the foal doesn't improve by three to four months. While other options exist for older foals, these procedures are more invasive and run the risk for more complications.

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