

Minimize Challenges & Protect Performance: Simple Strategies for the Transition Period



Why It Matters

The transition period, from 3 weeks before to 3 weeks after calving, is the most challenging time in a cow's lactation. Cows face major changes in nutrient demands, feed intake, and social dynamics, which can contribute to disease. The effects of disease during this period can last well beyond the transition window:

250 to 410kg decrease in milk production ^{2,3,4,15}

15 to 25 days more to get pregnant ^{2,3,4}

2 to 5 times higher risk of involuntary culling ^{2,3}



MORE THAN 60% OF COWS EXPERIENCE DISEASE DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD¹

How to Improve

You cannot prevent every instance of disease, but the right management can make a big difference. **Focusing on feed intake, body condition, and disease prevention during the transition period** sets cows up for a healthier and more productive lactation.

1. Maintain Feed Intake

A drop in dry matter intake (DMI) before calving is normal, **about 18% on average⁵**, but larger drops predict trouble. Cows that eat less are **3 times more likely to get metritis⁶** and **2 times more likely to develop ketosis⁷**.

What Helps?

Provide adequate feed bunk space & avoid overcrowding

- Aim for **> 76 cm of feed bunk space/cow** in close-up and fresh pens⁸
- **Avoid pens with 3 rows of stalls** per feed alley, as they often limit feed bunk space and prevent all cows from eating at the same time
- Target **< 85% stocking density⁹** or **> 100 ft² per cow** in group pens¹³

Separate 1st lactation cows from older cows if facilities allow

- Separate groups to support **better intake and rest**, as 1st lactation cows **eat slower** and face **more competition** at the feed bunk

Always keep fresh feed accessible

- Feed for **3-5% refusals**
- Push-up feed **frequently**

Formulate and deliver rations consistently

- **Balance ration** to provide all key nutrients
- Ensure correct **particle size and moisture level** to minimize sorting
- **Avoid sudden changes** in diet
- Consult with a **qualified nutrition advisor**

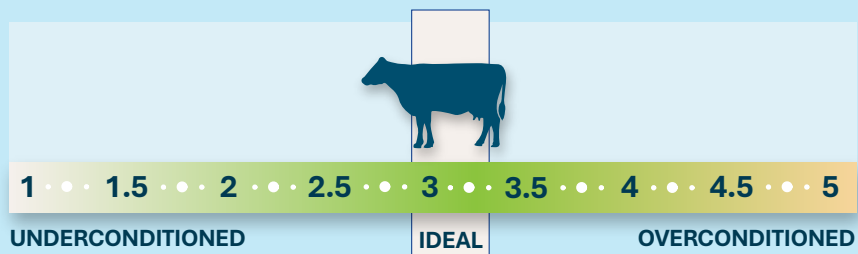
2. Avoid Excessive Body Condition Score (BCS)

Cows with a **BCS ≥ 3.5** at calving are **more likely to develop ketosis, displaced abomasum, and reproductive issues**^{10,14}

What Helps?

Target a BCS of 3.0-3.25 at calving.^{10,11}
Avoid overfeeding energy in the dry period and monitor condition in late lactation

Avoid abrupt diet changes or social stress



3. Reduce the Risk of Disease

Cows are most vulnerable to diseases like hypocalcaemia, ketosis, metritis, and displaced abomasum in the **first 3 weeks after calving**. These conditions **often occur together** and can start a domino effect of health problems.

What Helps?

Minimize drops in feed intake and weight loss

Balance diets to match cows' changing needs

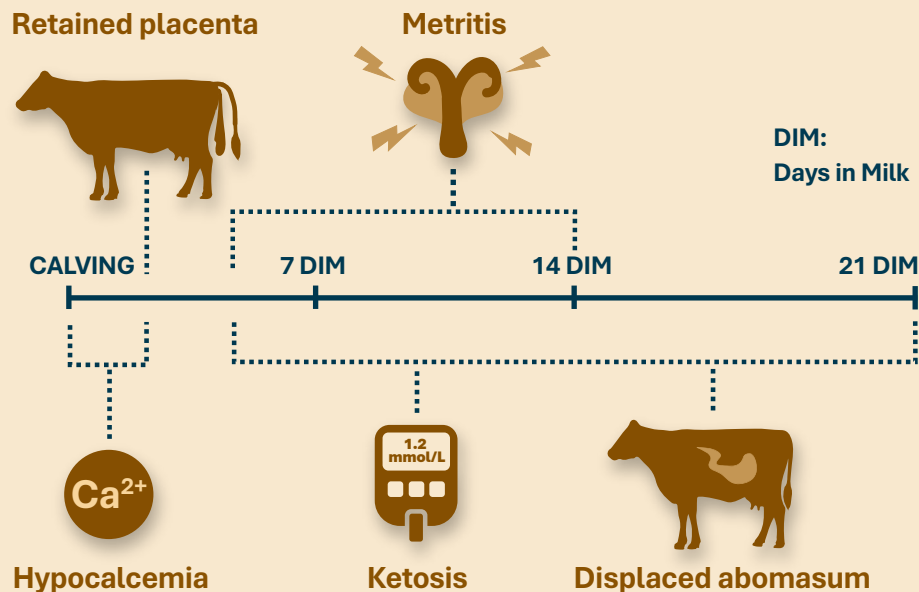
Maintain clean, dry stalls to reduce infection risk

Use low-stress handling and keep routines consistent

Monitor cows to detect signs of disease early

Consult with your veterinarian and qualified nutrition advisor to design prevention and treatment protocols

COMMON DISEASES IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD



Take Action on Your Farm

1. Ensure feed is easy to access and hard to sort
2. Avoid overcrowding in dry and fresh pens
3. Prevent over-conditioning before calving
4. Maintain clean, low-stress environments
5. Monitor fresh cows closely and act early
6. Work with your veterinarian and qualified nutrition advisor

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