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In 1991 she married and moved to Newmarket to join RosSDales Equine Practice as Head Nurse. During her 12 years in the role she helped develop the first qualification for equine veterinary nurses in the UK and gained her own UK qualifications.

Bonny continues to mentor nursing and veterinary students at RosSDales, while developing her own interests in critical care nursing, wound management and neonatology. She is a past President of the BVNA, equine nursing editor of the VNJ, and volunteered on the veterinary team for the London Olympics/Paralympics equine events. Email: bonnymillarevn@millarconsulting.com

Equine nursing “how to” guide – “Folding” a foal into lateral recumbency as a form of restraint

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To prevent stress in a newborn foal it is important to familiarise them as much as possible to human handling. Described below is a method that can be used to safely and effectively restrain a foal, causing minimal stress and enabling routine clinical tasks to be undertaken.

When a newborn foal is “cradled” by the handler, it will often exhibit what is known as the “floppy foal” response. This is a normal and natural reaction when pressure is applied around its body, causing the foal to sink to the ground. When the handler lets go or removes some of the pressure, the foal will instantly become alert, “pop up” into standing and run away. This is an innate response to being caught by a predator. When that predator

(i.e. the handler) releases the foal (i.e. the prey), it rises quickly and runs away.

There are a variety of reasons why a neonatal foal, in a clinical setting, would need to be deliberately placed into lateral recumbency: for veterinary exams, for intravenous catheter placement, for the application of special shoes or casts, and for short surgical procedures. “Folding” a foal is a safe way to carry out this task in a controlled situation, similar to when it is being cradled. “Folding” only works on young foals, typically those less than 4 weeks old and/or 80 kg in weight. Foals that are older are deceptively strong and can easily hurt the handler or themselves while attempting this task. It is worth mentioning that “dummy” foals with



▲ **Figure 1.** Cradle the foal, holding it close to the handler's body.



▲ Figure 2. Gently bring the foal's muzzle and hindquarters together.



▲ Figure 3. As the foal relaxes and leans into the handler, allow it to slide down to the floor.

neonatal maladjustment syndrome find it harder to lie down compared to rising, so this method is useful in giving the sick foal much-needed rest.

Method

1. If the mare is at all anxious about her foal being handled, have her held by an assistant. It is important not to position any people assisting between the mare and foal as the mare might become more anxious if her view of the foal is obscured.
2. The foal and its handler need to be positioned somewhere in the middle of the stable, as it is easier and safer to "fold" the foal towards themselves. Ensure there is plenty of room behind to back away. Place a deep layer of bedding or a mat behind the handler for the foal to fall back on.
3. Cradle the foal around the base of the neck with one arm and hold the base of the tail or hindquarters with the other arm. Keep the foal close to the body (Figure 1).
4. Gently begin to bring the foal's muzzle and hindquarters together in front of oneself, effectively "folding" the foal away from oneself while supporting it against the body. As the head is brought around to the side of the foal, the handler's arm moves up from its neck with the forearm exerting pressure against the foal's head. With larger foals, the handler may need to brace their legs to prevent them losing balance as the foal relaxes against them (Figure 2).
5. The foal should start to lean against the body and relax. Moving back a little allows the foal to slide down one's body, allowing its legs to fall away from the handler while continuing to bring the head and tail together. The head is supported as the foal goes fully into lateral recumbency (Figure 3).
6. When the foal is lying fully in lateral recumbency, keep it in this position by exerting light pressure on its neck and by holding its down foreleg to prevent it from sitting up. The other arm can be used to steady the hind legs. Another assistant may need to straddle the foal's hind legs to discourage it from kicking out. At this



▲ **Figure 4.** When in lateral recumbency, the foal is held to prevent it from sitting up.



▲ **Figure 5.** Laying a towel across the recumbent foal's eyes will help it to remain calm.

point the foal may go to sleep if stimulus is not too great (**Figure 4**).

Laying a towel across the foal's eyes will help it stay calm and relaxed. Sedation is not always required prior to "folding" foals, but it may be needed if the

subsequent procedure is stimulating or causes discomfort (**Figure 5**).

"Folding" a foal is a tried and tested, simple but effective technique, used by stud vets and experienced stud personnel to manage foals for a variety of circumstances. It is a skill that the equine vet

nurse can learn and use to make caring for neonatal foals easier.

Reference

Costa, L. R., & Paradis, M. R. (2017). Restraining the neonatal foal. In *Manual of clinical procedures in the horse*, Chapter 42. Wiley Blackwell.