

## **Restraining Sheep and Administering Medications**

Our topics for this week are:

- Physical restraint of sheep and lambs
- Administration of injectable and oral medications to sheep

### **Restraint of Individual Sheep and Portions of Their Body**

#### **Halters**

Appropriate sized halters can assist restraining sheep. Most of the bridge of the nose is cartilage and can be compressed by a poor fitting halter. The nose strap should go over the bony part of the bridge of the nose and close to their eyes.

#### **Pressing Against a Wall**

Sheep can be restrained against a wall. The handler backs the sheep into a corner with a solid wall. It is pressed against the wall with one of the handler's legs between its neck and shoulder and the other leg against its chest. Additional restraint can be accomplished with a hand under the sheep's neck near its head.

#### **Straddling**

Straddling is restraint for using a bolus gun or drenching syringe on a sheep, taking rectal temperatures, and performing eye or mouth examinations. The handler backs a sheep into a corner, straddles its neck, and holds it still with his knees on both sides of its neck. Straddling the sheep's chest and using one hand under the neck to block forward escape provides more control, but only one hand is free to perform examinations and treatment.

If the handler is tall enough, straddling can also be used to move a sheep short distances. The handler places a hand under the jaw, straddles the sheep's body facing the sheep's head, and places one hand on its rump or tail. The handler can then shuffle forward while holding the sheep's jaw and rump. If needed, the sheep can be encouraged to move forward by squeezing its tail head.

#### **Tipping**

Sheep have a rump padded by wool and fat, and downward positioned tails. This allows them to tolerate being placed on their rump while leaning backward against a handler's legs. However, this will be resented if the tail has not had sufficient time to heal from being docked. The sheep does not have to be lifted to accomplish being tipped ("set up", "rumped"). The handler stands alongside the sheep's body, the sheep's head is turned away from the handler, and its rump is pushed down. After it sits with the legs away from the handler, its front legs are lifted and body turned slightly so that its back is leaned against the handler's legs. The sheep is tilted slightly onto one hip which makes it more comfortable and facilitates the handler freeing both hands to be able to shear. The sheep's head is tucked under an elbow as needed for better visibility and access to the lower chest and neck. Sheep "chairs" are restraint slings to hold a sheep in tipped

position without the need to lean on the handler's legs. Sheep are tipped for shearing, crutching (clipping wool from around the rump), and hoof trimming.

### **Backward Walk**

Moving a sheep a short distance is sometimes easiest by assisting it walk backwards. The handler straddles the sheep facing forward, picks up the sheep's front legs and has the sheep stand up on its hind legs. Continuing to hold its front legs, the handler walks backward to his destination while the sheep backpedals.

### **Tying Up**

As with calves, sheep can be restrained by tying their legs with a rope that loops over the back of their neck. Using a fixed loop of rope, a half hitch is placed around each hind leg above the hocks and the rest of the loop between front legs and over the back of the neck. With the sheep on its side, the head is positioned level with the body or pointed up an incline to aid in eructating rumen gas and preventing bloat.

### **Gambrel**

A plastic W-shaped gambrel can be placed on the top of the neck and both front legs placed in the crooks on each side. Sheep cannot lift their legs out of the gambrel while their head is pressed down by the gambrel. Gambrels are used for restraint during transit or treatment.

### **Trimming Hooves**

Small ruminant hooves that do not get worn down by rocky surfaces may need to be trimmed as often as every 8 weeks. Every 6 months is about average. Front hooves carry more weight and will wear down faster. To check whether trimming is needed, the rear hooves should be checked. Hoof trimmers for small ruminants look like garden pruners, but true hoof trimmers are sharper and easier to handle than pruners.

To trim hooves, the sheep is restrained to a stationary object and a foot picked up and the leg bent so that the bottom of the hoof is visible without causing discomfort to the animal. Other options are to place the sheep in tipped position against the handler's legs, in a sheep chair, or on a small tilt table. The bottom of the hoof is cleaned with a stiff hoof brush. The edge of the hoof should be trimmed until it is even with the sole. Any softened areas between the hoof wall and the sole need to be scooped out. Any excess growth between the heels should be trimmed. Uneven areas of the sole should be pared, but not enough that pink color appears. A light brush with a rasp can aid in leveling the bottom surface of the hoof. The dewclaws should be checked and carefully trimmed in small amounts, if needed.

### **Restraint of Lambs**

Lambs are captured as if picking up a small dog with a hand under its torso. Small lambs can be carried with one hand by a wrist and forearm under their chest and abdomen and the hand grasping the lamb's front leg nearest the handler's body.

In the first 2 weeks of life lambs are castrated and their tails are docked to prevent fecal accumulation and flystrike. Both these procedures can be done with the lamb held head up with its back toward the handler. The handler restrains the lamb's right front and rear legs with his right hand and the left front and rear legs with his left hand. The same hold can be used while

the handler sits and holds the lamb on its back (ventrodorsal) on the handler's lap.

Larger lambs can be restrained by straddling the lamb, holding the body by pressing the lamb just behind the shoulders with the handler's calves while the handler blocks forward movement with a hand behind the lamb's jaw.

Another method is to straddle the lamb, grasp each front leg and raise the lamb onto its hind legs and hold its chest between the handler's thighs.

## **Handling for Common Medical Procedures**

### **Injections and Venipuncture**

#### **Assess to Veins**

Sheep can be tipped on their rump for jugular or cephalic vein venipuncture. The femoral vein may be accessed with a sheep in lateral recumbency.

#### **Injections**

Subcutaneous injections are generally given under the skin behind an elbow, in the inguinal area, or fold of the flank. Intramuscular injections (IM) should only be administered in the side of the neck, except for nursing lambs. Nursing lambs should receive IM injections in the semitendinosus and semimembranosus in the back aspect of the thigh.

#### **Administration of Oral Medications**

To drench a sheep, a handler straddles its back, places a hand under its lower jaw, and raises its head slightly. The nozzle of the drench syringe is inserted between the cheek and the back teeth. The plunger is pushed in slowly allowing the sheep to swallow the liquid medication. Handlers should wear gloves and not put their fingers in the sheep's mouth.

Balling guns are used to administer solid medications. Sheep are caught individually and backed into a wall and straddled. The sheep's head is lifted under the jaw but its nose should not be lifted higher than the poll. Otherwise, its ability to swallow will be impeded. The balling gun is inserted in the mouth and the plunger pushes the bolus onto the back upper surface of the tongue. An oral speculum to protect the insertion of a stomach tube is placed in the same way.

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Sheep can be tipped on their rump against the handler's legs for restraint that frees the handler's hands.**
- 2. Sheep should have the hooves trimmed about every 2-6 months.**
- 3. Intramuscular injections in adult sheep should given only in the side of their neck.**

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: [www.betteranimalhandling.com](http://www.betteranimalhandling.com)

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.