

Should Milk be Fed While Calves are Scouring?

This is an often asked question. Different ways currently exist for feeding milk or milk replacer while feeding oral rehydration solution to scouring calves. One way is to cut milk out completely and only feed oral rehydration solution for the entire treatment period. Another way is to only feed the oral rehydration solution for 2 days then feed half and half with milk the last day. And the third way is to feed the rehydration solution and milk as well in separate feedings.

Calves need enough energy to maintain their weight as well as their immune system, especially when they are sick. Oral rehydration solutions cannot provide enough energy because they are limited in the amount of glucose that can be added in order to keep the osmolarity of the solution low. Therefore, feeding milk or milk replacer supplies more energy and protein, allowing calves to maintain weight.

A study at the University of Illinois found that once scouring occurred, full feeding of milk as well as rehydration solution for the 7 days of treatment resulted in a body weight higher than if milk was withheld for either the first 2 days or partially withheld during the treatment period. Early intervention was important to ensure that enough electrolyte was provided to replace the liquids the calf was losing.

If using electrolytes containing alkalinizing agents such as bicarbonate, citrate, lactate, acetate or propionate it is essential to allow at least two hours (preferably four hours) between feeding milk and electrolytes, to avoid the electrolyte inhibiting the formation of casein in the abomasum, e.g. feed milk in the morning, electrolytes at midday, milk in the afternoon and electrolytes in the evening. Sufficient electrolytes can be left in the feeder for the calves to drink at night.

BIOCALF™ Plus Energy Electrolyte Replacement has been formulated to replace lost fluids and electrolytes, supplement energy and correct acidosis that may have occurred as a result of diarrhoea.

It provides one of the highest available energy per dose at 380Kcal of any electrolyte on the market as well, as providing sodium, bicarbonate, acetate, citrate, potassium and chloride and also provides the prebiotic, Bio-Mos™ and probiotic ImmuBoost, two very effective non-antibiotic compounds and Gaurgum to slow the loss of fluids from the intestine.

Source: Penn State University. College of Agricultural Sciences