

When working with bovine patients it is important to know how to recognize potential dangers, perform proper approach and restraint, and apply distraction techniques for safe handling.

Potential Dangers

- The technician should always be aware of how far the animal is able to swing the head from side to side and its forward reach. Horned animals can fatally wound a handler by thrusting the head forward and sideways. Butting can be done whether the animal is **polled** or horned by pinning a handler to a fence or wall; or by swinging the head, knocking the handler down, and pinning them to the ground.
- Bovine can also use their body to pin a handler between other cattle, a fence, or wall.
- The front feet are rarely used in defense; however, serious injury can occur to a human foot if the animal steps on it. The hind feet are very dangerous because not only can cattle kick straight backwards, they can also kick out to the sides.
- The tail should be cleaned by removing burrs and dipped into warm water to remove frozen ice or feces to avoid injury to the eyes of the handler. The tail is very fragile and if the tail is tied it should always be tied to the animal.

Approaching Cattle

When approaching a cow, avoid sudden movements to prevent startling the animal. Talk to them with a low voice so they are aware of your presence. Do not approach cattle from the front because it sparks a natural instinct to charge. The safest place to stand next to a cow is at the shoulder but remember that bovine can kick past the shoulder. Cattle have a large field of vision with blind spots located directly behind them and a few degrees to the left and right of the rump. If you stand in their blind zone and create sudden loud noises or slap them with a whip or strap, they might kick or run. When herding cattle, the handler should walk past the point of the shoulder; this prompts them to move forward.

Restraint

Cattle respond differently to human contact depending on breed and gender. Dairy cows are accustomed to being handled and are usually the easiest to work with. Restraint is usually accomplished with **stanchions** or by tying them to a fence. Talk to and handle dairy cows gently or they may become nervous and resistant. Dairy bulls require special restraint techniques because they are so unpredictable. Nose rings, in addition to halters, are sometimes used for control while leading these animals.

Beef cows are frightened easily because they have little interaction with people and are restrained using **chutes** with head gates and alleyways.

Beef bull are handled in the same manner as beef cows but special attention must be paid around bulls when they are near cows in heat.

Rope halters are the basic tool for restraint in cattle. To apply the halter, the part that tightens is placed around the nose, with the loop down. The lead rope should be on the left side of the cow's head. The head can now be tied to a post, fence, or part of the chute. The position of the head is usually up and to the side. The rope should be secured with a hitch or halter tie. This method can be used for passing stomach tubes, dehorning, or eye examinations.

Nose tongs can be used for control or distraction because the nasal septum is very sensitive. When using nose tongs, make sure the balls on the tongs are smooth and not to close together. Close the tong handles together to pinch the septum taking care that it is not closed too tightly. Have a handler grasp the tongs or secure them to the halter. The thumb and index finger can also be used to apply manual pressure for short periods of time.

Hobbles are used to prevent cattle from kicking and can be padded straps held with a chain or an angled piece of metal that slips on the backside of the legs just above the hocks. Hobbles are placed on the back legs starting with the leg opposite the handler first, and then they are placed on the one closest keeping the legs square to allow the cow to maintain balance.

Hydraulic lift tables with the administration of sedatives can be used to place the animal in lateral recumbency to examine legs or hooves. Using rope to tie up the legs can also be used to examine the feet. Tail jacking is a distraction technique accomplished by lifting the tail straight up and forward from the base. This technique is effective because pressure on the spinal column removes sensation to the rear and is used for venipuncture or rectal examinations. Secure the animal from moving forward or side to side and hold the tail about one third of the way down from the base; pull the tail ventrally and over the midline of the back of the animal. Tail jacking should not be performed for more than a few minutes because of the possibility of fracturing the coccygeal vertebrae.

Note that a cow or other bovid that must be placed into **lateral recumbency** should always be placed on their right side.

Calf Restraint

Calves are moved by placing one hand under the neck and grasping the tail head or placing the other hand around the hindquarters. Calves that are up to 200 pounds (91 kg) can be placed into lateral recumbency by flanking or legging the calf. After the animal is down, a three-legged tie should be applied. The handler should then put one knee on the calf's neck and the other knee in front of the closest hind leg to hold it down. The handler should never turn their back to the mother; they are exceedingly protective and if underestimated could potentially kill a handler.

Reference

McCurnin, D. & Bassert, J. (2006) Clinical Textbook for Veterinary Technicians. St. Louis, Missouri. Elsevier Saunders. p 50-58