

"As part of our mission at Crazy Mountain Veterinary Service, we strive to empower ranchers to produce healthy profitable beef. One of the ways we can achieve this goal is to provide supplies and protocols to ranchers to treat common veterinary problems. A very common occurrence this time of year in baby calves is fractured lower limbs.

The first task is to assess the fracture. If the leg is broken above the hock or knee, then a veterinarian needs to be consulted. Additionally, if there is blood present or the bone is sticking out, a veterinarian needs to be involved in treatment decisions.

Capturing and restraining the calf must be done with care to avoid turning a simple fracture into a compound fracture (one with the bone through the skin). Older calves may need sedation to set the leg. However, very small calves with simple, minimally displaced fractures can often be cast without sedation.

The basic steps for casting a leg include padding the leg and applying fiberglass casting tape. We have more detailed instructions in the casting kits we sell with all the supplies needed in a handy tote.

The cast needs to stay on for 4-6 weeks depending on the age of the calf and the fracture. During this time the calf needs to be monitored daily to make sure he continues to use the leg. The cast itself should be monitored for warmth, breakage and loosening. If the calf stops using the leg, the cast should be taken off as soon as possible. A calf that was weight bearing on a cast and then stops using it indicates a complication. Some common complications are pressure sores caused by the cast getting tight on a rapidly growing calf. Additionally, if the fracture is not healing or has become compound and infected, the calf will stop bearing weight on the cast.

Give us a call if you have any questions about casting calves or other small ruminants!"

- Dr. Katie Rein