Hypothermia and Hyperthermia in alpaca

Hypothermia and Hyperthermia are conditions relating to the bodies core temperature. The normal body temperature of an alpaca is 37-38c. These can affect animals of all ages however young animals are most susceptible

_Hypothermia is where the body’s core temperature is below 37c and the alpaca is showing signs of organ shut down._ People commonly mistake shivering from cold as hypothermia, but this is in fact the body responding normally to cold and trying to heat up. In cases of hypothermia there is no shivering and very little eye response, reduced heart rate and if untreated internal organs begin to shut down.

New borns often show signs of hypothermia if they are born early on winter mornings or on cold rainy days. Wind and rain is the biggest contributor to hypothermia

Treating hypothermia is relatively simple; the body needs to be reheated. This can be done by drying and heating the animal with a hair dryer, in front of a fire or heater or even by immersing in a hot bath. For some reason alpacas seem to be able to withstand more rapid re-heating than humans. The first signs of improvement are shivering. Even though you may be able to re-heat the animal you need to check the body’s core temperature with a thermomotor to ensure that you don’t stop treatment too soon. If an animal has been hypothermic for an extended period there may have been permanent organ damage and they may not be able to be revived.

Hyperthermia

Where, the body’s core temperature is above 37-38c. This affects animals in summer and animals are usually at highest risk when temperatures exceed 38c for more than 3 consecutive days. New born’s are at particular risk because they can be born with hyperthermia if there has been excessive periods of heat immediately prior to birth and they are at increased risk of dehydration because they rely on their mothers milk supply for hydration. Alpacas produce minimal milk and cria need to drink frequently to replace fluids, unfortunately the excessive temperature makes them less inclined to drink and move around.

Although the solution to hyperthermia is to reduce the body’s core temperature, this sounds simple, but it is much harder to reduce the temperature in cria, because of the added complication of the need to rehydrate the cria. In most cases veterinary intervention will be required to put in an IV drip to replace fluids.

Older animals will show signs of heavy breathing and sitting, looking for shade and water. The simplest solution is to provide them access to water to sit in either troughs, dams or spray with hoses.

Over fleeced animals are particularly at risk, but the common belief is to shear off the fleece signs of heat stress a noticed. Depending on the time of the year it may not be the best idea. Alpacas should ideally be shorn if spring so that they have some fleece during the height of summer, the fleece protects from sunburn and insulates against overheating. If animals have over 18 months of fleece during summer they are susceptible to heat stress but this can be managed by providing access to water and shade. Shearing over fleeced animals in the height of summer can lead to an adverse reaction and they can suffer hypothermia due to low overnight temperatures, it also increases the risk of sunburn. Avoiding heat stress in older animals is easy, shear annually in spring and provide access to water and shade.

Infections can also lead to excessive temperatures so, in cases where they day time temperatures don’t support hyperthermia as a cause for heat stress, veterinary attention may be required. Hidden infections are often found in over fleeced animals because they may have acquired an injury that has become infected and untreated because it hasn’t been noticed under the overgrown fleece.

_NB: In both instances death can result if not treated._