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**A healthy sheep**

**Sleeping/waking**

Approximately 4 hours sleep.  
Several hours spent alert.  
When awake, alert, delicate and alert.

**Mucous membranes**

Pinkish

**Appetite**

Good appetite. Several hours a day spent ruminating, spread over 4-6 periods. Approximately 60 chews per day.

**Chest**

Spacious, lots of room for lungs and trachea.

**Breathing**

13-15 breaths per minute, calm, even breaths.

**Joints**

Not swollen, easy to feel.

**Movement**

Smooth, even.

**Ears**

Alert, warm

**Behaviour**

Alert, rubs

**Paralumbar fossa**

1-2.5 normal connections per muscle

**Fleece**

Thick, soft, clean, closed or loose without streaks

**SHEEP SHOULD HAVE:**

- A mouth that closes well
- A broad forehead with bright, alert eyes
- A straight back with wide lumbar vertebrae
- Wide, flat, gently sloping rump
- Long curved ribs
- A broad deep abdomen
- Straight pasterns
- Sturdy, straight front legs
- A broad deep chest
- A neck tapering upward
- Straight parallel hoofs

**Temperature**

38.5-40°C (101.3-104°F)

**Skin**

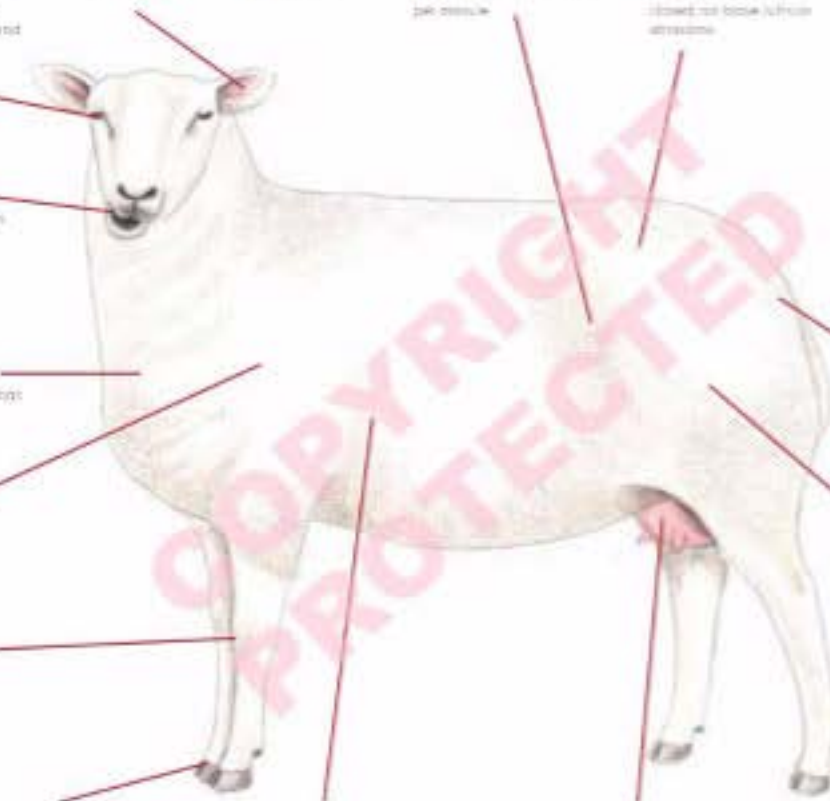
Distended pink

**Dung**

Dark, moist, moist

**Posture/stance**

All legs falling straight properly



**A sick sheep**

**Sleeping/waking**

Down on the ground up, down a long time to lie down. Unable to walk

**Mucous membranes**

Purple or dusky, dry, sunken below - low condition. Red face, blue blood vessels. White - anaemia

**Nose**

Dry, nose discharge

**Appetite**

Poor appetite, little rumination, dribbling, drooling, allowing food to fall from the mouth. Teeth grinding indicates pain

**Chest**

Front legs close together, little space for lungs and trachea

**Breathing**

Upper lip, mouth open, panting, coughing, purring, rattling. Breathing with a clear abdominal push or with constant head bobbing

**Joints**

Hot, swollen, stiff, painful

**Ears**

Drooping, cold

**Behaviour**

Unhappy, agitated, unresponsive

**Paralumbar fossa**

Visible less than 2 normal connections per muscle

**Fleece**

Matted, open, dry, not out straight

**Temperature**

Too high or too low

**Skin**

Dry, flaky, crusty

**Dung**

Clay-like, worm, compact, no dung



**Movement**

Staggered, stiff, uneven

**Heart rate**

Too fast, weak, irregular

**Udders**

Hot, red, swollen, hard, distended, firmness even back (secret)

**Posture/stance**

Hunched legs, rounded back

**Hooves**

Distorted, slanted, wet

# Introduction



Sheep signals tell us many things about how sheep are feeling and what they need.

## Watching sheep

Good sheep husbandry means doing the right things and doing them well all of the time. And that starts with picking up signals well. You need to take time to consciously pick up all of the signals that the sheep are sending out. To do so it is important to observe in two ways: with an open mind and by focusing in.

### 1. Observing with an open mind

To observe with an open mind, you need to forget about everything and watch a group of sheep as if for the first time. You need to take your time about it, so that you notice details that could indicate a problem. The animals will only display any anomalies if they do not feel disturbed. It is best if you have got nothing else on your mind and are not doing other work at the same time. Look at them through a stranger's eyes, or through a child's eyes.

Watching is not the same as just looking. Watching is a conscious process. When you are watching, you are searching for answers with your eyes. You can see even more by watching in a structured way. You need to get used to a proper system, because it needs to become a habit. To pick up signals really well, you need to be able to consciously apply all of your senses – you need to see, hear, smell, touch and taste and you need to do so attentively.

### 2. Focusing in

To be able to see things, you need to search for them. In the summer, for example, you should focus in on signs of flystrike. Are there any sheep that are twitching their tails frequently or twisting round? Is one of the sheep split off from the others or looking restless? Are there grey or damp spots in her wool? Have any of the sheep got dags? Are there a lot of blowflies around? You need to check that things are fine and that you are on top of any potential risk situations.

## Start wide-angle and then focus in

You should first look at the overall picture and then focus in, beginning with the whole lot and then zooming in to a few, starting from far off and moving to close up. But details that occur to you can only be judged properly in context.

So you need to focus back out again and look at the bigger picture. For example, why is one sheep standing up while the rest of the flock are lying down, chewing the cud?

## ATTENTIVE WATCHING REQUIRES YOU TO ASK YOURSELF QUESTIONS

As you watch, ask yourself the following questions:

### 1. What can I see?

Give an objective description.

### 2. Why is this?

Look for the cause.

### 3. What does it mean?

- Is it a signal from one animal, or is there something wrong with more than one animal (flock signal)?
- Is the information favourable or do I need to intervene?



### 1. What can I see?

Some of the sheep are asleep and some are not. The lambs are asleep and the ewes are alert.

### 2. Why is this?

The older ewes are watching over the sleeping lambs.

### 3. What does it mean?

This is normal flock behaviour.



### 1. What can I see?

This sheep has a swollen mandible or 'bottle jaw'.

### 2. Why is this?

This is caused by oedema fluid accumulation in the head caused by a blood and protein deficiency.

### 3. What does it mean?

This is caused by the parasitic barber's pole worm (*Haemonchus contortus*). Together these worms can drink as much as 500 ml (1.75 fl oz) of blood a day. More than one sheep will probably be affected, so the entire flock needs to be checked. Solution: check the mucous membranes of the other sheep (see page 24). Perform a faecal test and worm the sheep in accordance with the vet's instructions.