Loss of libido - how to cope!

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Introduction
A stallion should become interested in a mare in oestrus immediately and interact with vocal, olfactory and tactile investigation. He will achieve an erection very quickly, within 2 min of contact, and be ready to mount soon after this. Once mounted, he will enter the mare and begin thrusting. After 6–8 min he will ejaculate. The stallion will usually ejaculate on the first mount with a total breeding time of 1–2 min. A novice stallion that has never mated before may take longer to mount and gain intromission. He may mount the mare before gaining an erection or mount inappropriately from the side; he will, however, display good libido. The characteristics of a particular stallion’s reactions are dependent upon previous breeding experience, management and season. Some stallions breed efficiently with little contact with a mare, others require considerable teasing time.

Libido problems
Specific libido problems include slow starting novices, slow or ‘sour’ experienced stallions and specific aversions or preferences. In a summary of 250 cases of sexual behaviour dysfunction by McDonnell (1992), libido problems accounted for 50% of cases. Of these 26% were slow starting novices, 12% were experienced stallions with inadequate libido and 12% were unruly or over-aggressive breeders. The other 50% of behaviour dysfunctions were: erection problems 5%, mounting problems 6%, ejaculatory dysfunction 25%, sexual aggression and fertility limiting general behaviour problems 14%.

The novice stallion
Slow arousal and awkward approach occur regularly in the novice stallion. Some may require considerable time to achieve erection and mount; however, they quickly gain confidence after a positive copulatory experience, especially when ejaculation is achieved. Some stallions may take several sessions to gain confidence and it is during this time that a handler’s impatience or rough handling can create a dysfunction. Unnecessary punishment during this learning phase can lead to a profound disinterest in breeding.

Many young stallions are involved in competition and managed in yards where normal sexual behaviour such as vocalisation, interest in mares, erection and masturbation are discouraged, often with punishment. The potential downside to such ‘negative conditioning’ is suppression of libido (McDonnell et al. 1985; McDonnell and Hinz 2005). This makes it all the more difficult to then encourage such behaviour when presented with a mare in oestrus, leading to fear and confusion. In addition, previous administration of drugs to control sexual behaviour may suppress libido. Administration of oral almetogest (Regumate™) at 0.088 mg/kg bwt for 8 weeks suppresses testosterone levels and sexual behaviour (Brady et al. 1997). After cessation of treatment serum testosterone concentrations may take 4 weeks to return to pretreatment levels. Vaccination against GnRH using Equity™ (CSL Ltd., Australia) at intervals of 4 and 8 weeks have been demonstrated to suppress testosterone concentrations and libido in stallions lasting a minimum of 6 months (Janett et al. 2009).

The experienced stallion
In the case of the more experienced stallion, inadequate libido can be due to previous negative experiences. Inconsistent handling can lead to confusion with the stallion becoming disinterested. Some stallions, after long periods of consistent performance, develop poor libido or ejaculatory dysfunction, others develop problems after injury. Musculoskeletal pain resulting in difficulty in mounting may also inhibit libido if not addressed and managed appropriately. Some stallions may become frustrated and aggressive towards the mare or handler, whilst some may develop specific aversions or preferences. In extreme cases a stallion may become rigidly fixed to a specific routine (ritual bound).

Investigation of poor libido
In order to determine the nature of the problem it is important to take an accurate history to reveal any man made issues. It is important to perform a thorough physical examination as described by Crabtree (2010), in order to determine any physical problem which may lead to pain or discomfort, especially that which may be exacerbated by breeding. Then assess the stallion’s libido when presented with a mare in oestrus. Some stallions have an aversion to human intervention with an artificial vagina and so allowing the stallion to mount and copulate with a mare, suitably screened for disease, will help with assessment. Video recording can be useful to point out observations to the stallion handler and will record time.

Management of poor libido
Novice stallions benefit from minimal restraint and exposure to an older solicitous mare. Developing a regular breeding routine with an experienced and patient team can overcome many issues. Stallions with experience related libido problems often respond to behaviour therapy alone. Often this involves education or re-education of the stallion handler as well as the stallion. Continued exposure to mares and reduced exposure to other stallions will increase libido and androgen levels (McDonnell 1995). Pharmacological manipulation to stimulate libido should be considered a last resort. To reduce anxiety in cases of experience induced libido problems use 0.05 mg/kg bwt diazepam (slow i.v.) 5 min prior to breeding. To temporarily boost libido one can use 50 µg gonadorelin (Fertagyl) SC 2 and 1 hours before breeding.

References


