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Single mummified fetus in a mare
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Mummification of an equine fetus, though rare, is more commonly associated with a twin pregnancy rather than singleton pregnancy.1 A single mummified fetus was removed from the uterus of a 17-year-old multiparous Arabian mare at 341 days of gestation. Throughout the 11 month gestation, the mare was administered 22 mg altrenogest (Regu-Mate, Intervet Inc., Millsboro, DE) PO SID. When the mare’s mammary gland failed to develop at 339 days of gestation, altrenogest was discontinued and the mare came into estrus.

Transrectal palpation and ultrasonography of the mare’s reproductive tract revealed a closed cervix, moderate uterine edema, and a mummified fetus approximately 90-days of age in the uterine body. The fetal bones were mineralized and no fetal fluids remained. Aerobic culture of an endometrial swab obtained prior to uterine manipulations failed to produce any bacterial growth. The mare’s cervix was digitally dilated under sedation; the mummified fetus and fetal membranes were manually removed. Following the procedure, the mare’s uterus was lavaged with sterile saline and oxytocin was administered (20 IU, IV) for two consecutive days.

Reports of fetal mummification in the mare are rare and most are associated with twin pregnancy. Mummification typically occurs during the third to eighth month of pregnancy following the death of the fetus in a sterile environment.2 Once a fetus dies in utero placental progesterone production ceases and the fetus is expelled from the uterus.1 In the case of fetal mummification, the fetus is maintained in the mare’s uterus where it undergoes autolysis and dehydration. The fetus is maintained by a continued source of progesterone3 from either a functioning corpus luteum, an intact fetoplacental unit from a surviving twin, or from an exogenous source.3 In this mare, oral progestogen supplementation (altrenogest) maintained cervical closure and prevented expulsion following death of the fetus.4

This case highlights the importance of regular fetal monitoring when mares receive progestogens during pregnancy. If a fetus dies in utero while a mare is receiving progestogen therapy, expulsion of the dead fetus may not occur leading to fetal mummification.5

References