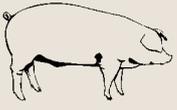


Got a question?



If you're experiencing a problem with your pigs, or want some expert advice about specific health or welfare-related issues affecting your stock, then get in touch and we'll do our best to help. You can write to: *Practical Pigs Magazine*, Kelsey Publishing Group Ltd, Cudham Tithe Barn, Berry's Hill, Cudham, Kent TN16 3AG or, more immediately, send an email to: Bob@trebasket.co.uk



Too much sun?

Q I have a group of 10 pigs which I keep in straw-based yards with an indoor kennel and outside runs. One morning, when I went to feed them, they were squealing and walking very stiffly towards their feed troughs when I arrived. Two out of a group of 10 were struggling to get to a standing position. What could be wrong? I noticed that certain individuals had very red skins, and black areas behind their ears.

Tom, via email

A The photograph Martin supplied reveals severe scabbing of the back of the pig's ears; typical of sunburn. I'm always somewhat surprised how very quickly pigs do show pinking of the skin which, especially behind the ears of flop-eared, white breeds or crossbred pigs, burns to the extent of oozing serum which then coagulates as obvious scabs. If the pigs have the opportunity for a deep wallow, then the scabs may not be immediately obvious because of an over-layer of mud.

The pig in the photo is clearly very sunburned at the back of the ears. Less obvious scabbing may be present elsewhere along the back, sides or udder area. If we can suggest any parallel between pig skin and that of humans, then pigs that have the degree of sunburn illustrated will experience pain.

Pigs with sunburn of the back will not stand for the boar during mating. I have seen individuals, or small numbers in a group, show reluctance to feed and to squeal when the skin of the back is rubbed. With severe sunburn, absorption of early embryos can occur in gilts or sows, with consequent unexpected delayed returns to oestrus.

The most severe pig sunburn that I've ever encountered was in a group which were receiving raw potatoes as part of their diet. These potatoes contained considerable numbers that were green and with some shoots. I'm convinced that these green potatoes, and the effect they had on the liver metabolism, ensured that what might otherwise have been moderate sunburn, became extremely severe and very painful instead.

The pigs resented being made to move, and individuals had such clearly painful backs that they could not rise. I assume you're not feeding green potatoes to your pigs, Tom? Recovery was aided by treatment with a veterinary-prescribed corticosteroid, combined with good nursing.

Preventing sunburn and its consequences relies on owner awareness. As the season changes from winter to spring, good wallow preparation and management is needed. Usually May is the preparation month, but this year we've needed really good, deep wallows in April. Many individuals will seek shade or their huts, but some seem to relish the sun, and then suffer the consequences! Perhaps there's another human parallel here...

Finally, never forget that the many pigmented breeds have white portions (saddles or face stripes etc) which can be vulnerable. Also, very stress-susceptible pigs may react with an increase in core body temperature to a level which can result in heart failure and death.



Sunburn can be a very unpleasant and painful experience for pigs leading, in the worst cases, to heart failure and death.