



# How to check the ram is fit for breeding

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## Timing

10 Weeks before the start of the breeding season examine each ram. This gives you enough time to:

- 1) Build-up body condition.
- 2) Sort out health problems.
- 3) Purchase quality replacements.
- 4) Acclimatise replacements.
- 5) Quarantine purchased stock.

Video & podcast available online



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## Handling unit

You must have a good handling unit to safely handle rams. Rams are powerful & unpredictable. Have a collecting yard where you can watch individual rams walking for signs of lameness & poor mobility. Also have a catching area i.e. forcing pen or dosing race where you can lay your hand with ease on each ram in a confined space & where the ram cannot move away. Wear medical examination gloves when handling rams.



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## Body condition

The target body condition for a ram at the start of the breeding season is 4. Find out why some rams are thin. Is it age, disease, lameness. It takes 8 weeks to put on 1 unit of body condition. Put thinner rams on 8cm of good quality leafy grass or feed them meal to improve condition. 1 unit of body condition score is about 13% of live-weight. Do not let rams become over-fat. Over-fat rams tend to be lazy & prefer to lie down.



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## Eyes

The eyes must be clear & alert. Check eyes for scaring, cloudiness, blinking. Apart from affecting a ram's own sight infections like pink-eye can easily infect your flock. Signs of pink eye include blinking, excessive tears, & damage to the surface of the eye. Never buy from a flock where pink eye is suspected. Unaffected rams can act as carriers. Avoid rams that suffer from entropion or turned in eye lids. This is an inherited condition. Symptoms include turned-in eye lid, excessive blinking, watery eyes, cloudy or scared cornea.



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## Incisor teeth

Run your thumb over the incisors. You should not be able to feel the tops of the incisor teeth. They should close firmly onto the dental pad. Overshot incisors tend to drift forward overtime. This increases the chance of teeth falling out. Green drool around the lips is sometimes a sign of a badly undershot lower jaw.



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## Molar teeth

Feel along the outside of the jaw. It should be smooth. Sometimes a molar tooth falls out leaving a gap. The opposite tooth has nothing to wear against & grows into this gap. In time a long sharp cheek tooth appears discouraging cuddling. Signs of a molar problem include green drool at the side of the mouth or lumps of fodder between the molars & cheek. Never put fingers into the rams mouth.



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## Brisket

A sore brisket before mating is often caused by excessive lying due to lameness or poor mobility. Brisket sores must be spotted & treated early. Early signs include excessive lying & reddening of the brisket. The affected ram should have a clean dry surface to lie on. If lameness is involved, cure it. Sores that appear during mating maybe due to a badly fitted harness or harness studs.



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## Feet

A ram needs to have 4 good feet. Watch that each ram walks correctly. Look for signs of lameness or poor mobility. Workout the cause & location i.e foot or hip. Then turn-over each ram. Check each foot for signs of lameness. Check between the claws for scald. Check for arthritis particularly in older rams.



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## Penis

Examine the penis & area around it for blood, infections like orf or excessive staining. Check for injuries which could be caused by briars, thorns or shearing. There is a simple technique that can be used to extend the penis from the sheath to examine it for a full set of working parts, infection & injury.



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## Testicles

There should be 2 evenly sized descended testicles free from lumps. They should have the springiness of a bicep. They should move freely within the scrotum. At the bottom of the testicle is the epididymis. Each epididymis should be free from lumps & have a rubbery feel. The scrotum skin should have a clean infection-free appearance.

