No more tears: How to make disbudding easy and painless for you and your kids!

by Lora Wittenberg

Kidding time! It is, by far, my favorite time of year! How many will we get? What color will they be? And of course, will they be does or bucks? The anticipation and hot debate of these oh-so-important questions drums up a kidding fever around our place that far surpasses the excitement of Christmas. Finally, the big day comes and you have welcomed your long awaited bundles of joy into the world, they have been dried off, fed and now they are sleeping peacefully.

Yet, in this quiet break the thought strikes you, “Oh no, disbudding season has begun.” Your mind flashes back to the smoke, the smell, the bleeding, the screaming and the guilt (you don’t want to hurt your baby, you, “Oh no, disbudding season has begun.”)

There are several different methods to complete this horn block, what follows is the technique that has worked best for me. The stress of the procedure makes you hurry through the process, sometimes missing a little bit of that pesky horn bud and leading to a repeat of the whole event at a later date. But what can you do? What must be done, must be done, right? Well that question (along with a great anesthesia lecture) got me thinking, investigating and experimenting. Now I can say: I have found a better way!

I present to you my fellow disbudding-dreading goat lovers. The Cornual Nerve Block! With four correctly placed injections of a 0.5% lidocaine solution, you can numb the top of your kid’s head so they can completely not feel the disbudding procedure. Just think, no more screaming and wiggling! You can take the time you need to make sure all of the horn bud is gone and you don’t have to feel bad about it. The total cost for all the involved supplies comes to $0.38 per kid. Quite a bargain in my mind, when you consider the time and stress this simple procedure saves.

However, lidocaine is a prescription drug and as with any medical procedure, there are risks, so I strongly recommend that before attempting this block that you discuss it with your veterinarian and have them show you how to do it.

**Supplies:**
- 22-gauge needles
- 1 ml syringe
- 2% Lidocaine (prescription drug)
- Sterile saline

There are several different methods to complete this horn block, what follows is the technique that has worked best for me. In order to desensitize the horn buds of the kid, you will need to numb two separate nerves: the zygomaticotemporal nerve and the infratrochlear nerve. There are paired nerves with one each on both sides of the head, so you will be making four separate injections to anesthetize the horn buds.

First, you will need to prepare the drugs. Lidocaine is commonly sold in 2% form, but for use in kids you will need to dilute it to 0.5%. This can be done by combining 1 part lidocaine with 3 parts sterile saline. Due to their light weight, kids are susceptible to overdose. It is important that the total doses (the sum of all fur injections) is less than 2.72 mg per pound of kid. Each 1 ml injection of the 0.5% lidocaine contains 5 mg. So, for example, if you had an 8 pound kid the maximum dose you could give her would be 21.78 mg, or four 1 ml injections.

Now is a good time to locate the injection sites on the kid’s head. In order to numb the zygomaticotemporal nerve, you need to imagine a straight line between the outside corner of the left eye (lateral canthus) and the left horn bud. You will make your injection at the halfway point along this imaginary line. Insert the needle between the skin and the skull at this point. IMPORTANT: Make sure that you pull back on the plunger of the syringe to ensure you are not in a blood vessel prior to injecting the drug! If you do see blood in your syringe pull it out, reposition your injection site and try again. If the coast is clear, you can now inject 0.5 ml to 1 ml of the 0.5% lidocaine solution.

Next, you will numb the infratrochlear nerve. Imagine a second line, this time between the inside corner of the left eye (medial canthus) and the left horn bud. Again, you will make your injection at the halfway point along this line. Be sure not to forget to draw back on the syringe, checking for blood. Inject another 0.5 ml to 1 ml of the 0.5% lidocaine solution. Repeat the procedure on the right side of the head using the right eye and right horn bud as landmarks.

Once you have completed the injections, allow several minutes for the anesthetic to take effect. Make sure you do not rush!