



LAKE SHORE
VETERINARY SPECIALISTS
&
EMERGENCY HOSPITAL

PORT WASHINGTON 262.268.7800 • RACINE 262.554.5344

www.LakeshoreAnimalHospital.com

FISH HOOKS

What is it? Fish hook impalement and ingestion affects many animals every year. Animals can become curious about brightly colored, shiny lures or attracted to remaining bait or the remaining scent of bait on the hooks. What can start as a case of curiosity can end up with fish hooks being consumed, imbedded in the mouth, lips, or tongue, or with fishhooks imbedded in the paws.

Which animals are affected? Dogs and cats of all ages run afoul of fishhooks. If you see a fishhook imbedded in your pet's flesh or suspect that they consumed one, contact your veterinarian or the nearest emergency clinic for an immediate exam.

What are the clinical signs? Clinical signs are dependent upon where the fishhook is located, what type of fishhook it is, and what type of pet you have. A significant number of animals end up with fishhooks stuck in their lips, tongues, or noses after trying to bite them. Cats tend to try to bat at a dangling fish hook with their paws and end up with it impaled in their feet or legs. They may even try to chew the hook out. If it is a multi-pronged or very large hook these cats can find themselves with their foot and mouth stuck on the same hook. If your pet swallows a fishhook that is still attached to fishing line, the line may still be hanging out of their mouth. If your pet may have eaten a fishhook and is now lethargic, having abdominal pain, vomiting, having diarrhea, or will not eat or drink, your pet needs to be seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible. Long haired or thick coated dogs have been known to step on or get snagged by fishhooks and have it hidden under the hair. If your pet is suddenly sore or limping and you locate a fishhook imbedded in it, do not attempt home removal. Instead take your pet to the nearest veterinarian or emergency clinic.

How is it diagnosed? Fishhooks in a visible area are diagnosed by a simple exam. Animals suspected of consumption of a fish hook will have x-rays taken to locate the suspected hook.

How is it treated? Fishhooks in a visible area need to be removed. Removal can be done at home if your pet has only one fishhook or one hook of a treble hook imbedded, if they are not inside the mouth or around the eyes, and if your pet is cooperative. Remember, the only way your pet has to tell you it hurts is to bite, and fishhook removal can be quite painful. Pain can cause even the most docile pet to react poorly and bite their owner.

If a single hook is imbedded in your pet's lip or paw in a place that you can push the barb thru the flesh you may attempt to remove it at home. You will need a small pair of pliers with a cutting edge, warm soapy water to clean the wound, and a second person to help calm and restrain your pet. Using the pliers, continue to advance the hook until the barb has pushed through to the other side of the skin. Use the cutting edge to snip off the barb and then back the rest of the fishhook out of the wound. Once the hook has been removed, wash the affected area with the warm soapy water being careful not to get it in the eyes, ears, or nose of your pet. It is recommended that you contact your veterinarian as soon as possible to discuss the incident, how your pet is feeling after hook removal, and whether or not they would like your pet to be on antibiotics.

If a hook is imbedded in more than one body part or multiple barbs of a treble hook are impaled in your pet, then removal at a veterinary facility is best. Also, if your pet has multiple hooks imbedded in it, pain

medications and anesthesia makes removal much less painful. The doctor will examine your pet and make recommendations for pain medication, sedation, and/or anesthesia based on your pet's medical history, location of and number of hooks. Once your pet is pain medicated and sedated or anesthetized as needed, the hooks will be removed. If any hooks are imbedded in your pet, in a manner that the barb can not be exposed to be snipped off, a small incision into the skin will be made to remove the hook. Antibiotic therapy may be initiated depending upon the location and number hooks. Pain medication may be provided for you to administer to your pet at home as he or she heals.

If you see your pet swallow a hook, they need to be seen by their veterinarian or the nearest emergency veterinarian, as soon as possible. If you see your pet with a string hanging out of its mouth, do NOT pull on the string. If there is a fishhook on the end you will "set" the hook just like with a fish, only you will be setting it into your pet's esophagus or stomach and will make the situation much more critical than it was. Gently hold the end of the string to keep your pet from swallowing it and transport them to the nearest veterinarian immediately.

What is the aftercare? Aftercare is dependent upon how bad the impalement was. Most animals will go home on antibiotics and/or pain medications. Some may need to have stitches if the hook caused a sizeable wound. Animals that swallowed a hook will need to have greater post op care dependent upon where the hook was lodged, how extensive the surgery was to remove it, and whether the hook was removed from the chest cavity or abdominal cavity.

What is the prognosis? Prognosis for a simple fish hook impalement in the face, chest, or paw is good. For a fishhook that is consumed, prognosis is dependent upon what area of the body it became lodged in. Prognosis is poorer if it perforated from the esophagus into the chest cavity or from the GI tract into the abdominal cavity.

Can it be prevented? Yes, most fishhook impalements and consumption can be prevented. Store fishing gear away from pets in a shed, garage, or spare room that can be closed off. Don't leave fishing tackle unattended, even for just a moment. A curious pet can get into trouble very quickly. If you take your dog fishing with you, watch them closely to ensure that they do not get near fishing hooks. Do not encourage them to play with fish still on the line. Keep tackle boxes closed and extra fishing poles properly stored.