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PERINEAL HERNIA

What is it? A perineal hernia is a hernia or “out-pooching” of tissues from the abdomen between the muscles of the pelvic diaphragm (the muscles that support the rectum) and into the perineum.

What animals are affected? Perineal hernia can occur in any animal, but we most commonly see it in middle-aged to older intact (not neutered) male dogs. Breeds that are over-represented include Boston Terrier, Corgi, Collie, Old English Sheepdog and Dachshund.

What are the signs? Sometimes the only clinical sign is a swelling or poochiness on one or both sides of the perineum, near the anus. Some animals with perineal hernias will have difficulty and may strain to defecate. If the urinary bladder becomes trapped in the hernia, they will have difficulty urinating or may experience complete urinary obstruction, which can be life threatening.

How is it diagnosed? Diagnosis is based on physical exam, and, in particular, rectal examination. On a normal rectal exam, there is good support on either side of the rectum and ones finger can not deviate side to side. With a hernia, there is little to no support, and it may even feel like there is a pocket to the side of the rectum. The urinary bladder and prostate can often be felt in the hernia, but if there is any question about this, radiographs or a contrast study (dye is injected into the urethra and urinary bladder via a catheter) can be done to better visualize the bladder and check its location.

How is it treated? Perineal hernias are treated surgically. The herniated tissues are reduced (placed back where they belong), and the wall of muscle that should be supporting the rectum is reconstructed or reinforced using muscles from the floor of the pelvis and sometimes the back of the thigh. If the bladder was herniated or the colon is enlarged or deviated from being in the hernia, these organs can be brought back into the abdomen and pexied in place (sutured to the body wall to create a permanent adhesion) to prevent further problems. We also strongly recommend castrating male dogs with hernias, which will take away any hormonal influence, will help shrink the prostate gland, and has been shown to decrease the rate of hernia recurrence.

What after care is needed? The patient’s activity is restricted for about 2 weeks. The surgical sites are monitored and cool/warm compresses applied to help with swelling. We often recommend a highly digestible diet (to decrease the amount of stool produced) and mild laxatives, if needed, to prevent straining.

What is the prognosis? Prognosis is generally good for complete resolution of the hernia after surgical repair and castration.

Can this be prevented? There is no known prevention for perineal hernias; however, this condition is rare in castrated dogs. Castration takes away the hormonal influence of testosterone, which may contribute to weakness of the muscles of the pelvic diaphragm and can result in prostatic enlargement, which is also thought to play a role in hernia development.

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