

## BASIC INFORMATION

### Description

A perineal hernia forms when the muscles surrounding the posterior part of the pelvis, rectum, and anus become weakened. The rectum bulges into the weakened muscles of the pelvic canal, forming a diverticulum (outpouching). This causes the dog to strain, and the straining causes the muscles of the pelvic canal to break down even more. Parts of the rectum, bladder, or prostate can move through the gap in the pelvic muscles and become entrapped in the hernia.

### Causes

Perineal hernias are most common in older, male dogs that have not been castrated. Changes in hormone concentrations (decreasing testosterone, possibly increasing estrogen) are thought to cause muscle weakening, which can eventually lead to hernia formation. Constipation or enlargement of the prostate gland may also be important factors in some dogs, but these conditions do not need to be present for a perineal hernia to form. Perineal hernias are very rare in cats.

### Clinical Signs

The hernia may be visible as a large, soft swelling over the rear end, near the anus. A hernia may develop on one or both sides. Dogs often strain repeatedly as if attempting to pass stool, giving the impression they are constipated. If the bladder or prostate gland is caught in the hernia, the dog may have severe abdominal pain or may strain repeatedly as if trying to urinate. If the bladder is trapped in the hernia for a long period, a form of kidney failure occurs from the urinary obstruction, which causes the dog to become very ill rapidly. Signs of prostatitis may be present in some dogs.

### Diagnostic Tests

The presence of a hernia can usually be confirmed by your veterinarian through a rectal examination using a gloved finger. Rectal examination is also necessary to define the size of the defect in the wall of the pelvic canal. If trapping of the bladder or prostate gland in the hernia is a possibility, abdominal x-rays may be recommended. Laboratory tests and chest x-rays are often performed prior to surgery.

## TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

### Treatment Options

Treatment of perineal hernia requires surgery to reduce the hernia (push the contents back into their normal locations) and repair the

muscular wall of the pelvic canal. If the dog has not previously been castrated, castration at the time of the surgery may decrease the chance of a recurrence.

If the dog is seriously ill from a urinary obstruction and the bladder is entrapped in the hernia, then emergency measures may be necessary prior to surgery. Urine can be withdrawn from the bladder by insertion of a catheter in some dogs or by the use of a needle and syringe in other dogs. Urine is removed until the bladder is small enough to be manually pushed into the abdomen, or a urinary catheter can be inserted. Intravenous fluids and other therapy for kidney failure are instituted, and surgery to repair the hernia is delayed until the dog is stable. If the bladder cannot be repositioned, then emergency surgery may be needed.

After surgery, most dogs are started on laxatives and low-residue, high-moisture food. These measures soften the stool and decrease straining during defecation, helping to ensure a good postoperative result. Usually, conservative therapy with laxatives, low-residue diets, and manual removal of feces without surgery are not sufficient to manage the problem, because the underlying muscle weakness and herniation are not corrected. These measures may be tried, however, in dogs that are unable to withstand surgery because they are high anesthetic risks.

Because the muscles of the pelvic canal are weakened, the surgical repair may not be strong enough to resist forces that are exerted when the dog strains to defecate, and the repair may break down. If the hernia is large and affects both sides, or if the hernia has recurred after surgery, your pet may be referred to a veterinary surgery specialist for more advanced surgery that could involve moving muscles from the upper leg and inner thigh to reinforce the repair, insertion of synthetic meshes, or other procedures.

### Follow-up Care

Following surgery, the dog should be kept quiet until the sutures are removed in 10-14 days. Notify your veterinarian if any straining or signs recur after the surgery.

### Prognosis

Prognosis for a perineal hernia is uncertain because of the possibility of recurrence following surgery. Fecal incontinence may occur after surgery if hernias were repaired on both sides. Some dogs die from complications such as kidney failure.