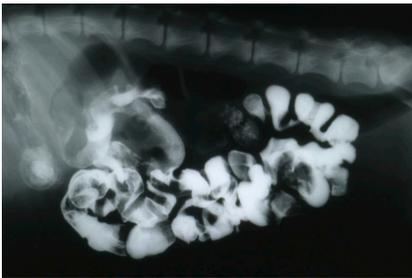


Intestinal Foreign Bodies

Objects that a pet ingests may cause a partial or complete obstruction of the intestinal tract. Once foreign objects are ingested they can become stuck at any point along the gastrointestinal tract (including the esophagus). Common objects are balls, toys, rocks, corncobs, clothes, string, towels, or pits from fruits. If a partial obstruction occurs, some ingesta can pass the object and the pet may not show severe clinical signs. If the object causes a complete obstruction of the lumen of the intestinal tract, the pet develops rapid and severe clinical signs.

Dogs and cats of any age or breed have been known to ingest foreign objects. This behavior does not change as they get older or if they have had previous surgery to relieve the obstruction from ingesting a foreign object. Clinical signs your pet may show include lethargy, vomiting, poor or no appetite, and a painful abdomen. These signs can develop acutely if there is a complete obstruction or may be less severe and chronic if the object is partially obstructing the lumen.

Diagnosis is usually based on history and clinical signs, but either radiographs (plain x-rays or a barium swallow) or an ultrasound is needed to confirm the diagnosis. Medical treatment before



Radiograph of a dog with a string foreign body. Radiopaque contrast material has been fed to the dog, and the plicated bowel shows up on the x-ray (above). Right - the same dog at surgery - note how the intestines are bunched together by the string.

surgery includes replacement of fluid loss with intravenous fluids, anti-emetics, and antibiotics. Some foreign objects in the esophagus and stomach can be retrieved using endoscopy, but the majority will need to be removed with surgery. It is important to pursue surgical intervention promptly to avoid perforation of the intestine. Surgical treatment involves a celiotomy to explore the abdomen and find the foreign object. An enterotomy (incision into the intestine) or multiple enterotomies can be performed to remove the foreign object if the intestine is healthy and not damaged from the object. A resection and anastomosis of the intestine may need to be performed to remove the foreign object if the intestine has been perforated or damaged from the object. This is more common in linear foreign bodies (string).

Complications associated with intestinal foreign bodies are necrosis of the intestine, perforation, peritonitis, sepsis, and dehiscence. Perforation of the intestine can lead to peritonitis which is a severe infection of the abdominal cavity that needs to be treated promptly and aggressively and may lead to death of the patient despite medical treatment. Dehiscence is leakage from the sutured intestinal incision line. When the intestine is entered and sutured closed, it normally will heal very quickly. However, the underlying physiological effects that the foreign body has on the blood supply of the intestine can be deranged and lead to impaired healing. If healing does not occur normally, then the opening made into the intestine can open up leading to peritonitis. If this does occur, it usually will happen between 3 and 5 days postoperatively and will require immediate re-exploration of the abdomen. The mortality rate for peritonitis can be as high as 75%.

After surgery it is important to limit your pets access to foreign material as many pets will be repeat offenders and continue to eat foreign material.