

Perineal Hernia

The pelvic diaphragm is made up of three muscles which support the rectal wall. When these muscles fail a hernia occurs. The rectum can become distended with feces which impairs defecations, and other organs such as the urinary bladder or prostate can become entrapped in the hernia which can lead to a life threatening situation.

Causes: Multiple factors can contribute to the weakening of the pelvic diaphragm including male hormones, straining to urinate/defecate, and neurologic conditions. Unilateral or bilateral hernia can occur. Dogs, especially sexually intact males, are more frequently affected than cats.

Diagnosis: Most animals present with a history of straining to defecate. A swelling on one or both sides of the anus may be noted. The diagnosis is made by a digital rectal examination performed by the veterinarian. An abdominal radiograph to visualize the position of the urinary bladder is recommended. Preanesthetic blood testing and an ECG are usually needed prior to surgery.

Treatment: The goal of surgical treatment is to relieve constipation and to prevent life threatening organ entrapment. Herniorraphy (hernia repair) is always recommended. If a pet is sexually intact, then castration will be performed at the time of hernia repair. The most successful procedure for herniorraphy is the internal obturator muscle transposition technique, where a nearby muscle is used to repair the defect. Very rarely a surgical mesh is used to close the hernia. Some surgeons will do bilateral hernias at the same time, while others like to wait several weeks between the surgeries. Here at VSC, the surgeons prefer to do both hernias at the same time. Surgical experience has been shown to directly correlate with success of this surgery. This surgery requires meticulous attention to anatomy and surgical technique and is best performed by a Board Certified Surgeon.

Aftercare: Your pet will need to wear an Elizabethan collar until the sutures or staples are removed. Most patients are sent home on stool softeners and a high fiber diet. Your pet will need to be restricted in activity for 3 weeks to allow proper healing. If your pet is too active after surgery, this could lead to failure of the surgery. The sutures are removed 10-14 days after surgery.



Prognosis: The prognosis after surgery is good. Your pet should have improvement in comfort and decreased amount of straining to defecate after surgery. Some severely affected animals will need life long medical treatment to have normal bowel movements, but the majority of animals begin defecating normally within a short amount of time after surgery. Potential complications that can develop are rectal prolapse, fecal incontinence, wound infections, and recurrence of the hernia.