

BRIARPOINTE VETERINARY CLINIC

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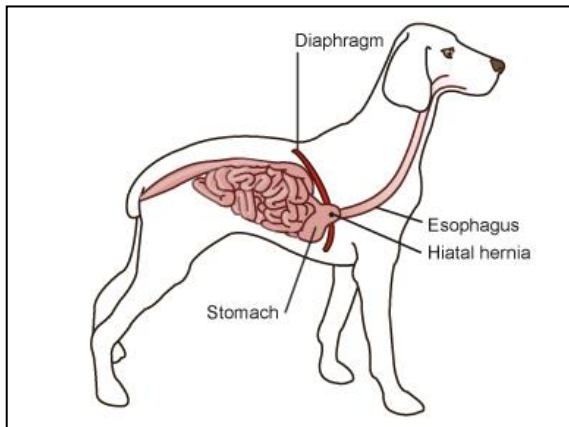
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HIATAL HERNIA IN DOGS

I have heard about hiatal hernias in people. What are they and do dogs get them?

A hernia occurs when one part of your body protrudes through a gap or opening into another part of the body. Many types of hernias occur in the abdominal area. Hiatal hernias, also known as diaphragmatic hernias, form at the opening (hiatus) in the diaphragm where the food tube (esophagus) joins the stomach. When the muscle tissue around the hiatus becomes weak, the upper part of the stomach may bulge through the diaphragm into the chest cavity. Hiatal hernia refers to the protrusion of the abdominal contents into the chest cavity through the esophageal hiatus of the diaphragm.



What causes a hiatal hernia?

In most veterinary patients, hiatal hernia appears to be a congenital or birth defect. Trauma can also cause a hiatal hernia. The Chinese shar-pei seems to have a higher incidence of hiatal hernias than other breeds. Male dogs are thought to be at greater risk for having a hiatal hernia.

What are the clinical signs of a hiatal hernia?

Many dogs that have small hiatal hernias have no accompanying clinical signs. The symptoms most commonly associated with hiatal hernias include vomiting, regurgitation, excessive salivation, bloody vomiting and difficulty breathing.

How is a hiatal hernia diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on medical history, clinical signs, and radiographs. Most dogs will require a special radiographic dye study or contrast fluoroscopy for definitive diagnosis. Esophagoscopy and gastroscopy may also be performed.

How is a hiatal hernia treated?

Conservative medical treatment will usually be recommended when the condition is first diagnosed. Medications to help control esophagitis and its accompanying clinical signs are used at the start of treatment. Histamine H₂-antagonists such as cimetidine,

ranitidine or famotidine and the proton pump inhibitor omeprazole are commonly prescribed. Prokinetic drugs such as metoclopramide may help lower esophageal sphincter pressure and improve clinical signs. Antibiotics are used as needed to combat any secondary infections, especially if aspiration pneumonia develops. In severe cases, surgery by a board-certified veterinary surgeon may be recommended.

What is the prognosis for a dog diagnosed with a hiatal hernia?

The prognosis for hiatal hernia is guarded. Many dogs will develop secondary conditions such as aspiration pneumonia. We can give you a more accurate prognosis based on your pet's specific condition and clinical signs.

Edited by John S. Parker, DVM September, 2007.
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