What You Should Know About Canine Urethral Obstruction

Causes
The most common urethral obstruction develops when your dog has bladder stones and one or more of these stones lodge in the urethra. Other conditions that narrow or completely obstruct the urethra include: inflammation due to bacterial infections or crystals (the building blocks of bladder stones); trauma; tumors; and diseases of the prostate gland.

Signs
Your pet may exhibit the following symptoms: frequent urination; dribbling of urine; straining to urinate; bloody urine; loss of appetite; vomiting; and pain. If your pet can’t urinate, take it to your veterinarian as quickly as possible.

Diagnosis
Your veterinarian will perform an in-depth physical examination including a rectal exam and palpation (examination by touching) of the urethra and urinary bladder. These procedures may disclose an enlarged prostate gland or stones in your pet’s urethra and urinary bladder. Other tests that help your veterinarian diagnose the cause of urethral obstruction include: examination of urine with the aid of a microscope to reveal the presence of crystals, blood, and bacteria; urine culture; blood tests; x-rays; qualitative analysis of voided bladder stones; ultrasound; and surgical biopsy of urinary tract tissues.
Treatment and Home Care

If your pet’s urethra is blocked, your veterinarian will hospitalize your pet and reestablish urine flow. This is usually accomplished by inserting a catheter into the urethra and flushing crystals and stones back into the bladder. Anesthesia is usually necessary for this procedure. Occasionally, stones lodged in the urethra will need to be removed surgically. Fluid therapy corrects dehydration, restores normal electrolyte balance, and hastens the removal of urinary wastes from the bloodstream.

Because a urethral obstruction isn’t a disease itself, but rather a sign of a disease, your veterinarian will correct the cause of urethral obstruction after urine flow is reestablished. Castration, for example, is the treatment of choice for some types of prostate gland enlargements. Many types of bladder stones can be dissolved by feeding special foods and giving drugs, but surgery may be needed.

Once you’ve taken your pet home, you’ll need to follow your veterinarian’s instructions carefully and monitor your pet to make sure reobstruction doesn’t occur. You should provide access to fresh, clean water and give all prescribed medications. If surgery was performed, you should restrict your pet’s activity as directed by your vet and check the incision daily. In addition, you may need to return to the hospital for suture removal and follow-up lab tests and x-rays.

Nutritional Plan

If your pet has bladder stones, your veterinarian may recommend a special food to dissolve the stones in the bladder. These foods work by reducing the building blocks (amino acids, magnesium, phosphorus, and calcium) that make up bladder stones. They also affect the urine pH and increase urination to help flush the urinary tract. Such foods include Hill’s® Prescription Diet® s/d® Canine Dissolution for dissolution of struvite stones, antibacterials if bacteria are present and Prescription Diet® u/d® Canine Non-Struvite Urinary Tract Health and medications for dissolution of some stones. Up to 50 percent of all dogs with bladder stones have a recurrence of the problem. After bladder stones are dissolved or removed surgically, special foods can help manage nutritional risks, such as excess calcium, phosphorus, and magnesium in the pet’s normal food. Foods that reduce the risk of struvite stones include Prescription Diet® c/d® Canine Urinary Tract Health. Foods that aid in reducing the risk of other stone types include Prescription Diet® u/d® Canine Non-Struvite Urinary Tract Health.

Transitioning Food

Unless recommended otherwise by your veterinarian, gradually introduce any new food over a seven-day period. Mix the new food with your pet’s former food, gradually increasing its proportion until only the new food is fed.

If your pet is one of the few that doesn’t readily accept a new food, try warming the canned food to body temperature, hand feeding for the first few days, or mixing the dry food with warm water (wait ten minutes before serving). Feed only the recommended food. Be patient but firm with your pet. This is important because the success or failure of treatment depends to a large degree on strict adherence to the new food.

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Home Care Instructions

Client’s Name: _________________________________________________________  
Patient’s Name:  _________________________________________________________  
Medication(s):  _________________________________________________________  
Nutritional Recommendation:  ____________________________________________  
Follow-Up Appointment: ________________________________________________  (Hospital Stamp Area Above)  

REGULAR VISITS WILL HELP OUR VETERINARY HEALTH CARE TEAM PROVIDE FOR YOUR PET’S BEST INTEREST.