



Always consult with a veterinarian that you feel comfortable with before diagnosing or treating any disease on your own. This information is for reference only.

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Umbilical Hernia

Issue Description

An umbilical hernia is the protrusion of abdominal contents beneath the skin at the navel (umbilicus).

Causes

The exact cause of an umbilical hernia is unknown although most are thought to be inherited. It is most commonly a congenital malformation caused by flawed embryogenesis. The umbilical opening is normal until birth as it contains blood vessels that pass through from the mother to the fetus. This opening closes at birth in the normal pet and a hernia results if the opening fails to close.

Symptoms

The symptom of an umbilical hernia is a soft swelling in the navel (umbilical) area. It is not considered critical unless the opening is large enough to allow organs or intestines to protrude. Most umbilical hernias are not serious. Small umbilical hernias have been noted to close spontaneously by the age of 6 months. For this reason, many vets will recommend waiting until the puppy is 6 months of age before repairing surgically.

Diagnosis

Definitive diagnosis of an umbilical hernia is by physical examination. Generally the contents of the hernia sack can be displaced back into the abdomen. This allows your veterinarian to determine the size of the hernia opening. The size of the hernia that is of most concern is that size which is similar to an intestinal loop.

This size has the risk of allowing a loop of intestine to drop into the hernia and become trapped causing a life-threatening "strangulation". Hernias that are smaller, thus too small for a loop to enter, or larger, in which loops can freely come and go, are at lower risk for potential strangulation.

Occasionally, radiographs with contrast material may be used to diagnose strangulated hernias.

Abdominal ultrasound may be used to determine the size and contents of the hernia in some cases.

Treatment

Some small hernias spontaneously close by the time the puppy is 6 months old and some dogs have lived with small hernias their entire lives without difficulty. Large hernias require surgery, which is often done when the dog is being spayed or neutered. Surgery is used to prevent a more serious condition where an intestine loop drops into the hernia causing life-threatening strangulation of the intestine.

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