Perineal Hernia
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Your pet has been diagnosed with a perineal hernia that requires surgical repair. Perineal hernias result from weakening of the perineal muscles and external anal sphincter. The exact cause is unknown but any condition that causes chronic straining (constipation and an enlarged prostate common in dogs that are not neutered), hormonal imbalances, and degenerative changes to the levator ani musculature are thought to contribute. The objectives of the surgery are to replace the contents of the hernia into the abdomen and reconstruct the pelvic diaphragm. Many different surgical techniques are available to the surgeon but using the obturator muscle to close the defect is the most commonly utilized procedure due as it is associated with fewer problems postoperatively and a lower recurrence rate. On occasion, if your pet has very weak muscles, a synthetic Marlex mesh is used to rebuild the pelvic diaphragm. If your pet is not neutered, neutering is necessary to allow proper healing and prevent recurrence. Although every effort is made to prevent or minimize complications, any surgery near the rectum has a higher complication rate than other areas of the body. Besides the obvious issue of fecal contamination that can lead to infection, pets frequently lick or scoot after surgery which can irritate the incision or prematurely tear out any sutures. Additionally, bowel movements can be affected due to post-operative discomfort and many times your veterinarian may prescribe stool softeners for a short time until the surgical wound is healed.

The urethra (tube that carries urine from the bladder) is very close to the surgical site and every effort is made to prevent inadvertent sutures from entrapping this structure including placing a urinary catheter in your pet before surgery. Additionally, the nerves that control the rectum are frequently involved in the hernia and all attempts are made to protect these nerves. Your pet can function adequately with loss of nerves on only one side of the rectum, but if your pet has bilateral hernias, there is the possibility of permanent nerve injury to the rectum. This is rarely a problem with an experienced surgeon. Although most surgeons will repair both sides at the same time if bilateral hernias are present, sometimes we will stage the procedure 4-6 weeks apart.

The biggest complication of perineal hernia repair is recurrence. If your pet has a recurrence, there are several salvage procedures available to the surgeon. Remember that neutering your male pet at a young age dramatically reduces the incidence of perineal hernias.

In some cases, your pet’s bladder may “retroflex” into the hernial sac causing a large swelling that may get bigger and smaller as the bladder empties and fills. Sometimes, the neck of the bladder can bend in a way that your pet can no longer urinate and this is a surgical emergency. If your pet’s bladder is involved in the hernia, it is very important to do an additional surgical procedure called a cystopexy, where the bladder is anchored inside the abdomen by one of two techniques depending upon the surgeon’s preference. Failure to perform this
procedure increases the risk of recurrence many fold. Unfortunately, this adds expense and anesthetic time but if critical to a successful outcome.