

CESARIAN SECTION / DYSTOCIA

Types of Dystocia

Dystocia is a broad term that refers to the inability to deliver puppies for any number of reasons. The most common causes include:

- **Uterine Inertia**- when the uterus does not contract normally to expel fetuses.
- **Obstruction of the birth canal**- by an abnormally large or malpositioned puppy.
- **Psychological**- from nervousness- seen primarily in toy breeds.

All owners of pregnant animals should prepare themselves by reading material on what to expect and how to identify problems during the birth process and early neonatal periods. To avoid confusion on the special day, it is recommended that a radiograph of the abdomen be taken a week before the due date to count puppy skeletons and identify any possible problems, for example one or two very large pups. If a cesarian section has to be done, it is better to do the surgery as early as possible. Waiting will only produce dead puppies, a riskier surgery, more post-operative complications, and a much larger veterinary bill.

If in doubt, it is always advisable to seek veterinary attention. Some breeds such as the English Bull Dog can not give birth naturally due to the wide shoulders of the pups and must be delivered via C-section.

Symptoms

- Straining and abdominal press for more than 4 – 6 hours without producing a puppy
- Greater than 30 minutes of active labor (abdominal press) with no puppy born
- Greater than 4 hours between puppies
- Weak or infrequent contractions
- Depression, weakness, or signs of sickness and toxemia in the bitch
- Green / black discharge from the vulva (normal in birthing)

Diagnosis

- **Vaginal exam**-to determine if the cervix is open and try to feel for a part of a pup in the birth canal.
- **Radiographs** should always be taken to determine the relative size and position of the pups, and to count the number of pups that still need to be delivered.
- **Blood calcium levels** should also be checked. The uterus requires calcium to contract well.

If the pups appear a normal in size & are in good positions, medical treatment is indicated first.

If there is a single large pup or one obviously wedged in an odd position in the birth canal, surgery is indicated.

Treatment- Medical vs Surgical

- **For primary uterine inertia or weak contractions of the uterus**, treatment consists of oxytocin- a hormone that causes the uterus to contract, and calcium which facilitates strong uterine contractions.
- **For dystocias caused by obstructions** including a mal-positioned fetus, an abnormally large fetus, or a twisted uterus, an emergency C-section is required- the sooner the better!

Prognosis

When treated early, both pups and the mother do well and are often discharged from the hospital within 24 hours after surgery. With an early medical attention or C-section, most times the entire litter can be saved. If the dystocia persists for more than 24 hours, both the pups and the mother are at risk. The longer the delay to surgery or medical therapy, the more pups and possibly the mother will be lost, even with a C-section. The key as always is early intervention for the most favorable outcome.