

LINEAR FOREIGN BODY

LINEAR FOREIGN BODY CAUSING INTESTINAL OBSTRUCTION

Anytime an animal ingests any object other than food, there is a risk of developing an intestinal obstruction if the foreign object becomes lodged in the intestine. Especially dangerous are linear foreign bodies, such as yarn, tinsel, fishing line, ribbon, Easter basket grass, cloth, or any other string like material. These foreign bodies can get stuck around the base of the tongue with the rest of it swallowed, or can get anchored in the stomach. As the other end of the string starts to pass down the intestine, it causes severe bunching, kinking up, and folding of the intestine as the string continues down the intestinal tract. Clinical signs include vomiting, anorexia, abdominal pain and sometimes diarrhea. As the intestinal bunching persists, eventually the string will slice through the intestinal wall which then allows leakage of intestinal contents (specifically bacteria) into the abdominal cavity. Once this occurs, peritonitis (infection of the abdominal cavity or belly) develops and the animal dies soon after without emergency surgery.

Symptoms

- Vomiting – usually acute onset and non-stop vomiting, projectile
- Lethargy / depression
- Abdominal (belly) pain- crying out, hissing when touched or picked up
- Reluctance to move –due to pain
- Straining
- Diarrhea-occasionally

Diagnosis

- **Physical exam**, the veterinarian can often feel bunching of the intestines in the abdomen and the cats are always painful (and let you know). The oral cavity should be examined to see if a piece of string is caught around the base of the tongue. Many cats will present with high heart and respiratory rates, and be weak and dehydrated.
- If the string has already perforated the intestines, the cats will be shocky with dark dry gums and weak pulses. Many are non-responsive to being handled, and often have a low body temperature.
- **Radiographs (X-ray)**- are used to look for a bunching up or plication obstruction pattern of the intestinal loops.
- **Ultrasound**- occasionally, ultrasound is useful for diagnosing a linear foreign body pattern.

Treatment- Emergency surgery

Surgery is required in order to remove the string foreign body. The belly is opened and small incisions are made into the intestine in order to remove the string that is within the

intestine. Any sections of intestine in which the blood supply has been cut off or the intestinal wall itself is too damaged is removed and the healthy ends of intestine are sewn together. Lastly, the abdominal cavity is flushed out with several liters of fluid in order to rinse off any bacteria that may have leaked from the intestines. The belly is then closed with sutures and the cat is woken up from anesthesia. For several days after surgery, the cat is given IV fluids, antibiotics, and supportive care.

Prognosis

With early surgery and aggressive supportive care after surgery, many pets do well and live normal lives afterwards. The prognosis for cats that already have tears in the intestine and bacterial peritonitis is more guarded even with surgery. The key is to do surgery before there is too much damage to the intestines.