

Hernia – Hiatal in Dogs

I have heard about hiatal hernias in people. What are they and do dogs get them?

A *hernia* occurs when one part of your body or part of an organ protrudes through a gap or opening into another part of the body. Many types of hernias occur in the abdominal area. *Hiatal hernias*, also known as *diaphragmatic hernias*, form at the opening (*hiatus*) in the diaphragm where the food tube (*esophagus*) joins the stomach. When the muscle tissue around the hiatus becomes weak, the upper part of the stomach may bulge through the diaphragm into the chest cavity. Hiatal hernia refers to the protrusion of the abdominal contents into the chest cavity through the esophageal hiatus of the diaphragm.

What causes a hiatal hernia?

In most veterinary patients, hiatal hernia appears to be a congenital or birth defect. Trauma can also cause a hiatal hernia. The Bulldog and Chinese Shar Pei seem to have a higher incidence of hiatal hernias than other breeds, although any breed can be affected. Male dogs are thought to be at greater risk for having a hiatal hernia.

What are the clinical signs of a hiatal hernia?

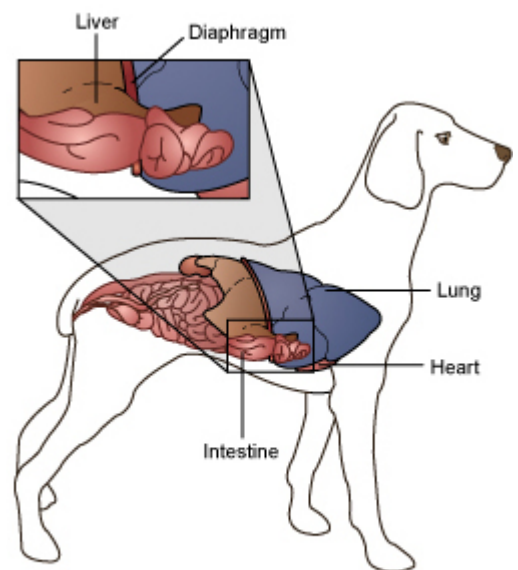
Many dogs that have small hiatal hernias have no accompanying clinical signs. The symptoms most commonly associated with hiatal hernias include vomiting, regurgitation, excessive salivation, bloody vomiting and difficulty breathing.

How is a hiatal hernia diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on medical history, clinical signs, and radiographs. Most dogs will require a special radiographic dye study or contrast fluoroscopy for definitive diagnosis. Esophagoscopy and gastroscopy may also be performed.

How is a hiatal hernia treated?

Conservative medical treatment will usually be recommended when the condition is first diagnosed. Medications to help control esophagitis and its accompanying clinical signs are used at the start of treatment. Acid-blocking medications and/or medications to relax the lower esophageal sphincter may be prescribed. Antibiotics are used as needed to combat any secondary infections, especially if aspiration pneumonia develops. In severe or chronic cases, surgery is recommended.



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What is the prognosis for a dog diagnosed with a hiatal hernia?

The prognosis for hiatal hernia is guarded. Many dogs will develop secondary conditions such as aspiration pneumonia. Your veterinarian will be able to give you a better prognosis based on your pet's specific condition and clinical signs.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM

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