

Mountain View Animal Hospital

129 Main Street, Essex Junction, VT 05452

(802)-879-6311

www.vtvvet.com

Constipation and Megacolon

Cause

Simple constipation has a number of causes. Some animals excessively groom themselves (especially if they are itchy) and find themselves passing stools containing large amounts of hair. This is not an uncommon cause for constipation. Some animals, especially dogs, get in the habit of eating gravel, dirt, bones or plants. This does not usually indicate a dietary deficiency as many owners suspect, though we do not have a good explanation for this unusual behavior. Stools produced can be sharp and painful to pass, often leading to straining and discomfort. Another important potential cause of constipation is electrolyte and hydration abnormalities, especially in older pets. Bloodwork becomes important to determine the physiologic status of an older pet and to determine if underlying diseases are playing a role in the constipation. In an intact male dog, an enlarged prostate gland is a common cause of straining to urinate and defecate. Neutering usually solves this problem unless something more serious such as a prostate tumor is present.

Treatment

Simple isolated episodes of constipation are easily treated with an enema. It is important to realize that pets do not take kindly to enemas and this kind of a procedure should not be attempted at home unless specifically instructed. Some cats have recurrent episodes of constipation and enemas may have to be used more frequently. In this case, your pet may be sent home on lifelong medication.

Recurrent episodes of constipation is sometimes due to a problem called megacolon. In megacolon, the colon becomes dilated and packed with an enormous amount of very hard feces. The cause of megacolon is unknown and the prognosis is poor without surgical correction. Surgery consists of removing the entire colon. Animals may have loose stool following surgery, but generally recover well.

Home Care

Animals with recurrent episodes of constipation may require long-term medication. This will likely be a laxative and possibly also a medication to improve intestinal motility. A diet change may also be necessary. Increasing the amount of fiber in your pet's diet will produce a larger, more bulky stool which, when passed, provides stronger sensory stimulation to the colon than a regular stool. This increased stimulation may result in better colon motility. We typically recommend Hill's w/d diet which comes in both canned and dry formulas. In addition, fiber can be added to the diet in the form of canned pumpkin, bran cereal or a Metamucil type product. Follow your veterinarian's advice regarding diet and medications.