

Urinary Problems in Dogs



By Lisa Nowicki, DVM
Animal Emergency & Specialty
Center - Parker, Colorado

Our canine friends are very special to us. Training them to be well-behaved members of our families can be one of the most rewarding and frustrating aspects of dog ownership. Finding an accident in the house is never a pleasant experience. Even the most well-trained animal may have issues from time to time. However, before you resolve that an accident is a behavioral issue, there are some things you should know.

Oftentimes, inappropriate urination can be a sign of underlying disease. Some diseases are simple and can be treated easily while some take lifelong management. It is important to have your pet checked to ensure they do not have a serious disorder. It is particularly concerning when your older, well-trained dog begins to have accidents in the house. This can be secondary to things just “not working well” down there any more. There are medications to help with what’s called urinary sphincter mechanism disorder. The urinary sphincter is a tiny circle of muscle in the urethra that constricts to keep urine in. When the muscle loses its ability to work, which can be just part of grow-

ing older, it allows the urine to leak out. Other more serious issues must be ruled out before presuming this is the cause. Primary urinary tract disorders include urinary tract infections, bladder stones and bladder cancer. A urinalysis is important to look for abnormal cells and bacteria. Sometimes dilute urine can make finding small bacteria and cells difficult. A culture of the urine is a more sensitive test and it will find even a very small amount of bacteria. Urine cultures are particularly important if infections appear to be resistant or recurring to specifically identify the bacteria and antibiotics that are appropriate to treat it. Imaging of the bladder (x-rays or ultrasound) is also important with recurrence of infection.

Abnormalities within the bladder can cause dogs to be more susceptible to getting an infection. Bladder stones can harbor bacteria and cause significant trauma to the bladder wall. There are many types of stones. Some stones can be seen on x-rays but not all. Ultrasound performed by a board certified radiologist or veterinarian who has had specialized training in using and reading an ultrasound is the most sensitive tool to look for all types of stones. Treatment can include surgical removal, endoscopic removal or diet changes. Some specialized clinics have additional procedures available such as lithotripsy which uses shock waves to break up stones so they can be passed.

Ultrasound is also the most sensitive way to identify tumors in the bladder. Bladder tumors can cause disruption of the animals ability to hold in urine and they can become infected. The type of tumor will determine prognosis and type of treatments available.

We can’t forget about the rest of the dog attached to the urinary system. There can be problems in the body that can cause

your dog to be predisposed to getting infections or they can cause over-production of urine. When dogs make more urine than usual, they may not get a chance to relieve themselves more often and this can cause pressure overload. Simple blood work to look for diabetes or kidney disease is very important. Both of these conditions can cause your dog to make/lose more urine than normal and can also predispose them to infections. These are both serious diseases that need to be addressed quickly and treated appropriately. Other more subtle endocrine disease such as Cushing’s disease can also cause increased urine production. Cushing’s disease, or hyperadrenocorticism, can have many clinical signs but they can also be very vague. This condition is caused by the adrenal glands producing too much cortisol which is a type of steroid. Other clinical signs can include weight gain, increased appetite, increased drinking, abdominal distention, panting, thinning skin, hair loss and increased urine output. Very specific endocrine tests need to be performed to diagnose this condition. It is very important to tell your veterinarian all the clinical signs that you are seeing at home in order to perform the necessary tests to ensure your older dog is in good health. Differences in how often they urinate, how much they urinate, how much they drink, their general attitude and behaviors all give clues as to what the causes could be.

Young dogs can be particularly difficult to diagnose if they are still in the training phase of life. Accidents can just happen sometimes. If you see puddles when your puppy is sleeping or accidents in the house, it may be worth looking into possible medical causes. A urinary tract infection can be the easiest to treat in puppies. However, there are other potential causes. Some urinary systems can be put together incorrectly, or what we



ANIMAL EMERGENCY & SPECIALTY CENTER

24 Hour Emergency
Cardiology
Critical Care
Internal Medicine
Oncology
Rehabilitation
Surgery



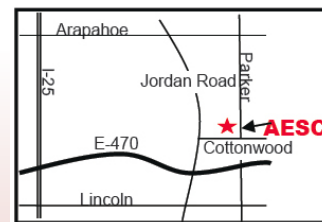
Dr. Lisa Nowicki

We specialize in making best friends...
and their families...feel better.
No matter what time of the day it is.

24/7

17701 Cottonwood Drive
Parker, Colorado 80134
www.AESCparker.com

720.842.5050
Advanced care,
Traditional compassion



call a congenital malformation. In male dogs, their longer urethras may mask clinical signs. Anatomical issues such as abnormal placement of the bladder or the ureters can be the cause. The bladder can be too far back, which is what we call a pelvic bladder. If it sits farther back in the pelvis, increased pressure on the bladder can cause urine to leak out. The ureters drain urine produced in the kidneys into the bladder. Urine is then held in the bladder by a combination of the bladder relaxing and the urethral sphincter tightening. If the ureters enter the bladder too far back beyond the sphincter, the urine can just leak out. These are called ectopic ureters.

These congenital malformations can be difficult to diagnose. Special contrast

to highlight the bladder and the ureters may be necessary while x-rays are performed. CT scan can also be utilized to look at where structures in the body lie. Directly looking at the vagina, urethra and the ureters can also be useful. This can be done using a scope. A scope is a small camera on a long thin, pliable apparatus. We can actually explore inside the urethra and look for abnormalities in these structures and obtain biopsies if indicated. Treating these conditions can also be difficult. Typically they involve surgical intervention to try and maneuver organs back to where they should be. It is important to look into potential causes and talk to your veterinarian about your puppy’s situation. The urinary system can be the source of problems in all ages of

dogs. Some conditions are worse than others. It’s important to know that there are many different underlying causes and tests that will need to be performed in order to diagnose your dog. Our pets can’t tell us when something is wrong and they depend on us to watch over them and keep tabs on what goes on in their lives. They rely on us to keep them both safe and healthy.

Lisa Nowicki, DVM, is a staff Emergency Veterinarian at the Animal Emergency and Specialty Center in Parker. She provides urgent and emergency care during the daytime and after hours. For more information, please call at 720-842-5050.