



PYOMETRA

What Does Pyometra Mean?

An infection within the uterus is called pyometra. Pyometra literally means “pus filled uterus.” This is a life threatening disease of female dogs and cats.

What Causes a Pyometra to Develop?

It is the result of an abnormal response of the uterus to the female hormone, progesterone. This abnormal response results in an excessive accumulation of fluid in the uterus which becomes infected. Pyometra usually occurs within two months of the animal's last heat period. It is a very common condition in middle aged to older female dogs, although it can occur in young dogs and in cats of any age.

What are the Symptoms of Pyometra?

Pyometra causes the animal to become dehydrated. As the infection spreads throughout the body, the animal may visibly ill and go into shock. The kidneys are often infected too. Death may occur if prompt medical and surgical veterinary care is not initiated.

The signs of pyometra may include a loss of appetite, depression, lethargy, vomiting, increased drinking, increased urination, and a discharge from the vulva which is often perceived to be a long heat period or recurrence of the animal being in heat.

How is It Diagnosed?

The age and history of the pet is suggestive. If the cervix is closed, animals are more likely to show signs of systemic illness, progressing to signs of septicemia and shock. There may be large uterus—careful palpation of the abdomen may allow determination of uterine size. If the cervix is open, the uterus may not be palpably large but there is a vaginal discharge. The vaginal discharge of mucus and pus is confirmed by microscopic examination. Blood tests, radiographs (x-rays), and ultrasound studies are often needed to finalize the diagnosis.

How is It Treated?

The recommended treatment for pyometra involves surgery, intravenous fluids, and antibiotics. The surgery performed is called an ovariohysterectomy (“spay”), which is the removal of the uterus and ovaries, thus rendering the animal infertile. Although it is a similar procedure to the “spay” that is performed on the young healthy dog or cat, it is a much more difficult and dangerous procedure when the animal has pyometra. The uterus is distended and filled with pus. The wall of the uterus is diseased, and may rupture, which can lead to a life-threatening infection of the abdominal cavity called peritonitis. The blood vessels to the diseased uterus are also engorged and are more apt to rupture and bleed. Also, because of the involvement of the kidneys and the spread of the infection throughout the body, postoperative complications are more frequent and more serious than those encountered with the spay of a young healthy female dog or cat.

Because of the spread of the infection throughout the body, antibiotic therapy is necessary for several days or even weeks. Intravenous fluid therapy is necessary to treat dehydration, shock, kidney disease and the systemic infection. On rare occasions, other medical or surgical techniques are used to treat pyometra.

Can It be Prevented?

Yes, because of the potential for life-threatening complications, it is in the best interests of your dog or cat to avoid pyometra by having her spayed when young and healthy.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve you!