

BASIC INFORMATION

Description

The prostate is a small gland that surrounds the beginning of the urethra. The urethra is the tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside. The normal prostate has two lobes, one on each side of the urethra, with a small indentation between the lobes. The prostate makes fluid that is secreted into the urethra during ejaculation of semen.

Benign prostatic hypertrophy or hyperplasia (BPH) is a symmetrical enlargement of the prostate that occurs in intact (unneutered), older, male dogs. It is the most common prostatic disease of dogs.

Causes

Testosterone causes certain types of cells in the prostate to grow in number (hyperplasia) and to enlarge in size (hypertrophy). Over time, this effect causes the prostate to become enlarged (prostatomegaly). A large prostate is normal in intact male Scottish terriers and should not be confused with BPH.

Clinical Signs

Most dogs with BPH do not have any clinical signs. Some dogs may strain to defecate, because the enlarged prostate presses on the colon. Rarely, the prostatic enlargement may partially obstruct the urethra, which leads to straining during urination. Other potential signs include a yellow or bloody penile discharge that is not associated with urination and blood in the urine.

In most dog, BPH is discovered during a physical examination. An enlarged prostate can be felt by rectal palpation, but the gland is not painful or irregular.

Diagnostic Tests

An enlarged prostate can be seen on plain x-rays. An abdominal ultrasound may be recommended, because it can confirm that the internal architecture of the prostate is preserved, even though the

gland is enlarged. A urinalysis and urine culture may be performed to rule out a urinary tract infection. Rarely, biopsy is needed to distinguish BPH from other causes of prostatic disease, such as prostatic infection or cancer.

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

Treatment Options

Castration is an effective treatment for BPH and is the recommended procedure. After termination of testosterone production (by removal of the testicles), the prostate typically shrinks to a normal size within 3-6 weeks. If castration is not performed, the effects of testosterone on the prostate can be blocked with the medication, finasteride (*Proscar*, *Propecia*). After finasteride is started, the prostate usually decreases in size by 70% within 10 weeks. If the drug is stopped, the BPH will return within 8 weeks. Finasteride can cause birth defects and should not be handled by pregnant women.

Monitoring alone may be chosen for some dogs with mild BPH and no symptoms. Despite anecdotal reports, Saw palmetto extract is not effective for treating prostate disease in dogs.

Follow-up Care

After castration surgery, the prostate is usually palpated again in 3-4 weeks to ensure that it is shrinking as expected. If the gland is not shrinking, then other diseases (such as prostatic cancer or infection) may be involved, and further testing for those diseases is often recommended. In asymptomatic dogs on no treatment, periodic examinations with rectal palpation are used to assess the prostate.

Prognosis

BPH is a benign disease, but it predisposes the dog to prostatic infections if left untreated. Prognosis is excellent with castration, because the surgery usually cures the condition.