

Megaesophagus in Dogs

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Does your dog regurgitate shortly after eating?

At the beginning of 2009, we announced our customers' pick for Veterinarian of the Year. Overwhelmingly, one particular veterinarian, Dr. Kathy Morris-Stilwell, stood out, and most of the essays we received were praising her for her advice on an Internet group for owners of dogs with a condition called Megaesophagus.

Megaesophagus is a rare disorder that a veterinarian may only see three times in an entire career, yet Dr. Kathy has helped thousands of concerned pet owners and medical experts with the advice they need to make the most informed healthcare decisions when dealing with pets with this condition. Through her efforts, many animals that might have been euthanized due to their diagnosis are now living happy, longer lives with Megaesophagus. Megaesophagus describes a condition in which the esophagus has lost muscle tone. Rather than appearing like a muscular hose, it dilates into a thin 'bag-like' tube. Most cases are congenital (existing at or dating from birth) and probably caused by a faulty nerve supply.

When a dog suffers from Megaesophagus, he tends to regurgitate his food shortly after eating. This is due to the diseased esophagus lacking the muscle tone to move food to the stomach. Food is swallowed, but sits in the esophagus until regurgitated. Some food, particularly liquids, may pass into the stomach. Should you be concerned



THE UPPER DIGESTIVE SYSTEM IN A NUTSHELL:

The mouth takes in food, which goes into the esophagus, a small hose-like tube that connects the mouth to the stomach. As it leaves the mouth, food or water follows a straight path through the neck and chest, passing near the heart through the diaphragm muscle, and finally entering

that your dog is exhibiting symptoms of Megaesophagus, contact your veterinarian and arrange an examination.

Congenital Megaesophagus has no known cure. Dogs affected with this condition must be fed liquid diets. The food is usually given from an elevated position so dogs eat while standing on their hind limbs. This elevated eating stance allows the liquid food to travel to the stomach via gravity.

Unlike some conditions, Megaesophagus is typically a lifelong battle. An infection or irritation of the nerve supply may only cause temporary symptoms, but this is rare. In most cases, Megaesophagus will have to be managed daily for the rest of the dog's life. But with the help of proper feeding techniques and veterinarian recommended precautions, many dogs can survive and do well.

the stomach. The esophagus walls are composed of muscles which move in wave-like contractions to push food into the stomach. In a dog, it takes about five seconds for food to move from the mouth to the stomach.