Case Study | Esophageal Dysfunction: Esophagitis and Esophageal Stricture

You’re finishing a procedure on a pet owned by your most obsessive client, and then it happens. The pet regurgitates. You keep it from aspirating and it seems to recover. Thinking you have dodged a bullet, you prescribe some famotidine and antibiotics, just in case, and warn the client to watch for any problems. Two weeks later, the client calls, the dog is drooling excessively, and it spit up everything it ate this morning on the rug.

Esophageal disease has many underlying causes but a common clinical presentation. Pets will often drool excessively, regurgitate, have a wet cough, and at times, lose weight. In this article, I want to focus on two causes of esophageal dysfunction: esophagitis and esophageal stricture.

Esophagitis can occur when there is any mechanical or chemical insult to the esophagus. This can include severe vomiting, so do not count this out just because the initial sign was vomiting and not regurgitation. Esophagitis should be treated promptly and aggressively to avoid serious complications such as a stricture. Treatment options include medications to control inflammation, most often steroids, antacids, sucralfate, and medications to tighten the lower esophageal sphincter and prevent reflux. Timeframe for treatment should be 2–4 weeks.

Esophageal strictures are often the result of a severe circumferential insult to the esophagus. Reflux during anesthesia is a documented cause of strictures, but esophageal foreign bodies and even trauma can cause them. Be aware that some medications, such as doxycycline, are also extremely irritating if stuck in the esophagus and can lead to strictures as well. Esophageal strictures are most often treated with balloon dilation. This can be done in our office under either endoscopic or fluoroscopic guidance, however, endoscopic guidance is most commonly used because it allows us to also evaluate for other complications such as the degree of esophagitis.

One of our recent patients, Stella, has had four balloon dilation procedures in the last three weeks. She is improving with each procedure. It has been rough at times, but two days after her third procedure, she finally slept through the night without regurgitation for the first time in two months.

If you have a case that you would like to discuss for possible referral, please do not hesitate to give me a call.

Melissa Riensche, DVM
Diplomate ACVIM
We are open and available to assist you and your patients throughout the holiday season, with the following modified schedule: Wednesday, December 31 – Open from 8 am to noon. We will be closed the following dates in observance of the holidays:
Wednesday, December 24 | Thursday, December 25 | Friday, December 26
Thursday, January 1 | Friday, January 2
In case of emergency, please call the Emergency Animal Clinic at 480.635.1110 (Option #1).

We wish you and your staff a very happy holiday season!

With only 200 board-certified cardiology specialists in existence today, we are proud to have two of them on our team, Dr. Whit Church and Dr. Kathryn Atkinson. Our philosophy centers on the belief that symptoms of heart disease are treatable. Our mission is to help you provide high quality health care to your patients and successfully manage cardiac conditions.

Cardiologists provide complete cardiac examinations for referred patients and perform additional diagnostics, as needed, to enable comprehensive cardiovascular evaluations. Such diagnostic tests may include:
- Echocardiography
- Holter monitoring
- Electrocardiograms
- Pericardiocentesis
- Chest radiographs
- Implantable EKG loop recording
- Blood pressure evaluation
- OFA cardiac breed certification

As the best diagnostic tool for early detection and monitoring of cardiac disease, echocardiography allows comprehensive evaluation of valvular insufficiencies, outflow obstructions, complex congenital heart disease, and systolic pump function.

DVMS has established a complete cardiac service that includes an interventional cardiac catheterization lab at our facility in Gilbert, located inside Arizona Veterinary Specialists. Services include:
- PDA closure
- Balloon valvuloplasty
- Invasive pressure measurements
- Pacemaker implantation
- Angiography
- Heartworm extraction

Our mobile services include patient examination and echocardiography at your practice in either Phoenix or Tucson. If the patient requires surgery, it can be performed at our practice in Gilbert with rechecks conducted at your clinic. Please call 480.635.1110 x7 for scheduling.
As veterinary technicians, we are one of the first people the clients meet, so it is important to make a good impression and make them feel comfortable. Please remember that if the patient is sick, the client is likely very emotional, so try and be understanding.

First, you should always introduce yourself to the client. Speak calmly and not too loudly while you start to get the patient's history. Most doctors have a different expectation on how to write up a patient's history. Some prefer a thorough history while some prefer to get most of the history themselves, so be sure to know what is expected of you. It is recommended to review any previous records you may have of the patient and try to get as much information as possible before going into the exam room. This will show the client that you care enough to do a little research before seeing them. This also helps with time management to ensure the visit goes smoothly and efficiently.

The most important points to address with the client are: Why are we seeing the patient? What medications are the owners giving, since when, and what dosage?

Lastly, one of the most important parts of a medical record is the TPR and weight. When taking these measurements, be sure to move slowly and be gentle with the patient. We also want to ensure that this is a comfortable experience for them as well as the owners.
Dr. Church, Dina, Andrea, and Darlene:

We want to say a very heartfelt “Thank You” for all you did to care for our Bella.

We know that your knowledge and efforts gave us some extra time with our sweet little girl.

The extra time was very precious for us, precious and very much appreciated.

Thank you!

Richard and Cleo