Nasal Congestion And Discharge: Nothing To Sneeze At

Gracie, a 12-year-old F/S Dachshund was referred for evaluation of congestion and thick nasal discharge. She had been treated with oral antibiotics for a cough five months earlier and was no longer coughing. Gracie did not have a history of allergies or any other illness and currently, aside from thick white nasal discharge and decreased nasal airflow, her physical examination was within normal limits.

Her case presents an excellent opportunity to consider the differential diagnoses for nasal congestion and discharge. A thorough history and oral examination helps determine whether chronic allergies or dental disease plays a role in the current problem. It is also important to understand when the signs began, how they progressed, and how they responded to prior treatment.

Evaluate/assess your patient for the following conditions:

- An acute onset of violent sneezing or reverse sneezing, pawing at the nose, or rubbing the nose or face, which is the classic presentation for a nasal foreign body.

- A tooth root abscess that has created an oronasal fistula, which can cause purulent and occasionally bloody discharge that may be accompanied by sneezing or reverse sneezing.

- Allergic rhinitis, which can result in variable clinical signs. Clear nasal discharge, sneezing, and reverse sneezing are common, and a secondary bacterial infection will change the discharge color (white, yellow, green) with or without blood. Severe allergic rhinitis can lead to epistaxis.

- A nasal tumor, which can cause discharge of varying character, epistaxis, sneezing, reverse sneezing, and congestion.

In Gracie’s case, based on her age and the history of coughing followed by nasal congestion and discharge, the top two differentials were allergic rhinitis with secondary bacterial infection and a nasal tumor. CT scan of the nose was the ideal diagnostic test, followed by rhinoscopy, biopsy, and bacterial cultures as indicated by the CT results.

She is currently completing a course of treatment for secondary bacterial infection and will return for CT of the head if her clinical signs have not improved.
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As soon as a patient receives any type of sedative or pre-anesthetic, you become responsible for monitoring them closely and making sure they are safe. If anything isn’t right or needs attention, you must let the doctor know immediately.

A very helpful tool in monitoring anesthesia is a Doppler, which provides an audible heart rate and blood pressure. An ECG is also useful, as it will pick up any arrhythmias and make sure the heart rate stays in the normal range for the anesthetized patient.

Every animal presents a unique heart rate, respiratory rate, and blood pressure, so make sure you fully understand the normal ranges for the animal under anesthesia.

Variables such as pain and whether the animal holds their breath can affect the depth of anesthesia. Keep a close eye on the patient at all times. Do not hesitate to step up and make sure the animal stays asleep. The patient’s temperature should be monitored closely to prevent hypothermia. The temperature affects recovery time. Knowing the non-sedated vitals is also very important because some animals run warm and have a high resting heart rate, whereas for others the opposite is true.

Importantly, use common sense. Do not always trust the monitoring machines as they can fault, and make sure you are always watching, touching or listening to the animal to verify.
I just want to say “Thank You” for taking such good care of Buttons throughout his life and teaching me how to take care of him at home. Buttons was a wonderful dog with a great personality. He enjoyed walks, car rides, those long squeaky dog toys and Slinkys. He liked dragging the toilet paper throughout the house. He would sometimes snoop in Mom’s purse to see if there were any goodies! He was a great companion – very loyal, and was a very happy friend.

You are all dedicated to your work and it shows in the way you took the time to listen and understand his situation. I could not have asked for a better care team.

Thank you,
Courtney Entz