

Megaesophagus in Dogs

Overview

No, megaesophagus is not a dinosaur: it is an unfortunate disorder that affects a dog's ability to swallow food and water. The esophagus is the tube that leads from your dog's mouth to her stomach: it expands and contracts, allowing food and water to pass into her digestive system. Megaesophagus is a condition that causes a decrease in the mobility of the esophagus, making it difficult for food to pass into the stomach.

There are several potential causes of megaesophagus. Dogs can be born with this disorder, it can develop shortly after a dog is weaned from his mother, or it can materialize later in life. Dogs that have a neuromuscular disorder at birth are also at risk, as megaesophagus can develop as a secondary condition to certain neuromuscular disorders, as well as to certain diseases, such as [myasthenia gravis](#), [Addison's disease](#), [hypothyroidism](#), and cancer. Finally, dogs can develop megaesophagus due to a foreign object or a mass located in or near the esophagus.

Some breeds that are at higher risk for inheriting this disorder include:

- Great Danes
- Shar-peis
- Newfoundlands
- Greyhounds
- Pugs
- Irish setters
- German shepherds

Symptoms

If your dog suffers from megaesophagus, you may encounter the following symptoms:

- [Bad breath](#)
- Regurgitation of food and water
- [Fever](#)
- [Cough](#)
- [Nasal discharge](#)
- Salivation
- Difficulty swallowing
- Weight loss
- Poor body condition

Diagnosis

If your veterinarian suspects your furry friend suffers

from megaesophagus they will work with you to understand exactly what signs your dog is exhibiting at home. They will perform a very thorough physical exam and recommend specific tests to confirm the diagnosis.

These may include:

- An endoscopy to evaluate the esophagus and the gastrointestinal tract
- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver, and pancreatic disease or dysfunction, as well as sugar levels
- Urine tests
- A complete blood count to screen your dog for infection, inflammation, or anemia and other blood-related conditions
- Electrolyte tests to ensure your dog isn't dehydrated or suffering from an electrolyte imbalance
- Pancreas-specific tests
- X-rays of the chest and abdomen
- An ultrasound to image the pancreas and other abdominal organs
- A thyroid test to evaluate if your dog has too little thyroid hormone
- A cortisol test to evaluate if your dog has [Addison's disease](#)
- Antibody titers to rule out immune-mediated diseases and other abnormalities

Treatment

Treatment for your pet will vary depending on the severity of the condition and if there is an underlying cause. Your veterinarian will also want to treat any other problems, such as aspiration pneumonia, that could result from your dog's difficulty in swallowing.

Unfortunately, there is no surgical procedure that can fix this condition; therefore, supportive care will be just as important as medication. Identifying the best way to help your pet eat and following all instructions from your veterinarian are key. It is critical to keep your best friend from accidentally aspirating anything into her lungs. Many creative, loving dog owners have mastered the art of helping their dogs suffering with megaesophagus to eat. Your veterinarian can provide helpful tips that will help you care for your much-loved pet.

Megaesophagus in Dogs

Prevention

Sadly, there is no prevention for megaesophagus. If you suspect your dog has trouble eating, swallowing, or breathing, contact your veterinarian immediately.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.

