

Points on Pets: Dogs often adjust well to amputation

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: We are really sad because our veterinarian has recommended that we have our dog's left front leg amputated. Our veterinarian has told us that because our dog is small and very energetic he will be able to play and enjoy his life for several more years following the surgery. We have never seen a dog with only three legs and are having difficulty imagining that our dog will be happy and playful again. However, it seems that we have no alternative to the amputation.

A: Anticipating what might be can be extremely frightening when considering a procedure as serious as amputation of the front limb of your four-footed friend. However, you can be assured that there are many dogs, both large and small in size, that have adjusted very well to having only three legs. I even know of a three-legged Seeing Eye dog that continued to lead his partner very well for several years following amputation of a limb because of cancer. Having a limb amputated is not the worst alternative if doing so will save your dog's life.

The time required for recovery following surgery to amputate a leg varies greatly from a few days to several weeks depending on the size, general health, and temperament of the particular dog. Most dogs with owners who have positive attitudes and who are willing to offer lots of encouragement usually recover quickly following surgery. It is interesting how many pets seem to sense the attitudes and moods of their owners. Therefore, if you are depressed about the amputation, your dog will also likely be depressed and not recover as quickly.

You should express your concerns to your veterinarian and ask for advice regarding how to hasten the recovery period. Your veterinarian might be able to provide the names of people whose dogs have had amputations so that you can talk with them about their experiences. Visiting one or two of these owners might give you courage to move on during this difficult time. There is no doubt that spending a few minutes with a happy three-legged dog while he is chasing a Frisbee or ball around the yard or house will help you feel better about the future for your dog.

Q: Because we have several dogs, we buy the most inexpensive dry dog food in the largest bags we can find at a discount center. Although all of our dogs seem to be healthy and happy most of the time, one large one occasionally experiences bloat. Is it likely that this dog's problems are being caused by the dog food?

A: While there are many reasons for occasional bouts of bloat in large dogs, the inexpensive dry food that you are purchasing in large quantities could be the cause. Of course it is important to always have plenty of clean, fresh water available. Soaking dry food before feeding it often decreases the incidence of bloat. You should have your dog examined by your veterinarian. Following the examination, your veterinarian can advise you regarding a complete wellness program, which will include feeding advice for all of your dogs.

Send an e-mail or write to Pets, Copley News Service, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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