Points on Pets: Heart defect can be mended

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: We are worried because our veterinarian told us that our puppy needs to have surgery to repair a heart defect. Our veterinarian has referred us to a veterinary teaching hospital associated with a college of veterinary medicine where a veterinary cardiologist and a surgery specialist practice.

Our veterinarian has tried to comfort us by saying that the surgery is routine and that the survival rate is high. Even though we have had our dog only for a few weeks, we are attached to him. Our puppy is part of our family.

A: Although you did not define the heart defect, it is most likely a patent ductus arteriosus (PDA). Your veterinarian is correct that the surgery is not complicated for most puppies; they usually fully recover within a few days. Dogs with corrected PDA's typically make excellent pets without any problems or noticeable deficiencies. You should have your dog neutered because the tendency to have a PDA is an inherited condition.

Before a puppy is born, it has a connecting artery, the ductus arteriosus, between its pulmonary artery and its aorta. This connecting artery allows most of the puppy's blood to bypass its immature lungs during the normal circulatory cycle in its mother's uterus. Before birth, the puppy receives most of its oxygen through its umbilical cord, which is attached to the fetal membranes and connected to the inner lining of the uterus. Immature fetal lungs are not required to supply oxygen for the developing puppy.

In most puppies, the short ductus arteriosus closes soon after birth. But, patent ductus arteriosus doesn't allow this closure to occur causing the puppy to develop a heart murmur. Hopefully, the repair on your puppy will be routine and he will be home recovering soon.

Q: Our dog has developed a disturbing habit. He passes gas. While this was funny the first time or two, it is now embarrassing and irritating.

What can we do?

A: Unfortunately, gas passing or flatulence is normal in most dogs. However, frequency often increases when dogs eat certain foods and swallow a lot of air while playing with chew toys or while eating food rapidly.

You should have your dog examined by your veterinarian to eliminate any disease conditions that might be

causing the flatulence. He or she can advise you regarding which foods will be digestible and appropriate for your dog.

It is sometimes helpful to give your dog several small meals throughout the day rather than one large one. This might decrease the amount of gas he passes. Hopefully, you and your veterinarian can find a suitable solution before he stinks himself out of your home.

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