

Tracheal Collapse

Tracheal collapse is a progressive, degenerative disease that causes the tracheal rings to lose their 'C' configuration. The cartilage of the tracheal rings in patients with collapse has fewer cells with less calcium and chondroitin sulfate compared to normal cartilage.

Management of Tracheal Collapse

A dog's trachea is constructed of thirty to forty 'C' shaped cartilage rings that are connected by ligamentous tissue. (Fig 1) Tracheal collapse is a progressive, degenerative disease that causes the tracheal rings to lose their 'C' configuration. The cartilage of the tracheal rings in patients with collapse has fewer cells with less calcium and chondroitin sulfate compared to normal cartilage. As degeneration continues there will be progressive flattening of the tracheal rings causing narrowing of the tracheal diameter. This narrowing is graded from 1-4, with grade 4 being the worst. (Fig 2)

The diagnosis of tracheal collapse is based on the patient's history, radiographs (x-rays), fluoroscopy or tracheoscopy. Breeds most commonly affected by tracheal collapse include Yorkshire Terriers, Pomeranians and brachycephalic breeds such as Shih Tzus and Pugs. The patient will present with a history of coughing which may be characterized as a 'goose honk'. The cough will occur when the patient is excited or under heavy activity, although in some extreme cases the cough will be constant. Radiographs can show the narrowed trachea and confirm diagnosis of tracheal collapse. Fluoroscopy is necessary on an awake patient to visualize the length of the trachea affected when coughing is induced. The trachea can narrow or collapse in the neck, chest or both.

It is critical to rule-out other diseases that can mimic tracheal collapse such as laryngeal paralysis, laryngeal collapse, severe heart disease, or lower airway (bronchi, lungs) disease. Early in the disease process, many of the patients can be managed medically with antiinflammatory drugs, cough suppressants, sedatives or bronchodilators. As the disease progresses, some patients may no longer respond favorably to medical therapy or may have concurrent disease that exacerbates the tracheal collapse (chronic bronchitis, heart disease, brachycephalic airway).

Vienna

The Hope Center
140 Park St, SE
Vienna, VA 22180
p 703.242.6000
f 703.242.8358

Leesburg

The LifeCentre
165 Fort Evans Rd, NE
Leesburg, VA 20176
p 703.771.2100
f 703.777.9968

Winchester

Valley Veterinary Emergency
and Referral Clinic
164-4 Garber Lane
Winchester, VA 22602
p 540.450.0177
f 703.777.9968

Woodbridge

Woodbridge Animal Hospital
2703 Caton Hill Road
Woodbridge, VA 22191
p 703.242.6000
f 703.242.8358

Intraluminal stenting for tracheal collapse has shown favorable results with 76-90% improvement. Placement of the stents requires general anesthesia with the aid of fluoroscopy. Measurement for the appropriate size stent is taken from radiographs or the fluoroscopic image. (Fig 4) The patient would require a second anesthesia to place the stent. The majority of cases show immediate improvement in clinical signs. Complications may include: dry cough, stent shortening, intraluminal scar tissue formation and stent fracture.

Surgery is a viable option for patients that have failed medical management. Several techniques have been described, but the most widely accepted surgical management of tracheal collapse in the neck remains polypropylene rings placed around the trachea, suturing the trachea to the prosthesis. (Fig 7) Overall, the success with this procedure is reported to be 75-85%, with reported complications including: persistent cough, laryngeal paralysis, patients requiring tracheostomies and intra-operative death. This technique is not a viable option for treatment of tracheal collapse within the chest due to an excessively high morbidity rate.

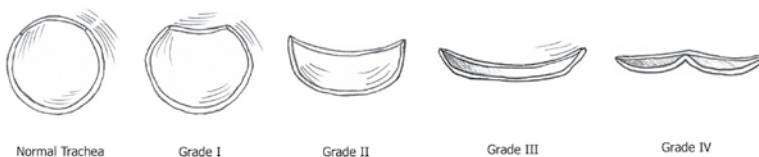
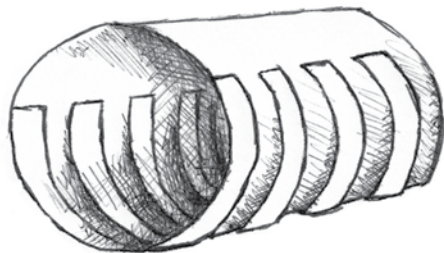


Figure 2
Grades of tracheal collapse

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