

General Health - Cryptorchidism (Undescended Testicles)

This article will help you better understand the developmental abnormality of cryptorchidism, or undescended testicles in male puppies. If your pet is showing any symptoms or signs of disease, please contact your veterinarian. We want you and your pet to be happy and healthy.

At birth, the testicles of a puppy are still within its abdomen. As the animal develops, the testicles slowly "descend" into the scrotum. In mammals, sperm development does not occur correctly at the high temperatures found within the body. The testicles are therefore held outside of the abdomen and within the scrotum to provide a cooler environment. The production of testosterone is usually not influenced by temperature.

Frequently, owners notice that the puppy they just purchased only has one or possibly no testicles within the scrotum. Although different dates are listed in some of the veterinary literature, both testicles are usually within the scrotum by the time the animal is six weeks of age and they should definitely be there by the time the puppy is eight to ten weeks of age. If one or both testicles are not present at that location by twelve weeks of age, they may never become external and the animal is said to be suffering from cryptorchidism or "retained testicles". This is a disorder that is considered to be inherited, ie, will pass through generations.

What are the symptoms ?

These animals rarely show any abnormalities because of this condition. They have normal activity levels, growth and behaviour. Although fertility may be affected, they will usually show normal breeding behaviour and frequently impregnate females, especially when one of the testicles has descended into the scrotum.

What are the risks ?

Some researchers believe that dogs with cryptorchidism may have a higher incidence of other testicular diseases. Specifically, these would be cancer and torsion.

What is the management ?

Cryptorchid dogs should not be breed from. This is a well-documented genetic trait, passed on to future generations. In addition, because of the potential for an increased incidence of torsion or cancer within the retained testicle, it is strongly recommended that all of these individuals be neutered.

The surgery to remove a retained testicle is more involved than a routine neuter. The veterinarian must literally hunt for the testicle which may be located anywhere from near the kidney to the inguinal canal inside the abdomen, or from the inguinal area externally to near the scrotum.

Retained testicles should be removed at some stage as a high percentage can become cancerous over time (greater than 8 years). While retained testicular cancers rarely spread outside the body, they can produce excess hormones and create a "feminization" syndrome, which is usually reversible by castration.

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