

**PECTUS EXCAVATUM:****Funnel chest in kittens and puppies**

**Overview—“I don’t understand what Pectus Excavatum is; please help me understand the condition and the treatment.”**

Pectus excavatum is an anatomical deformity of the chest wall that kittens and puppies are born with; kids get it too. It is an abnormal sunken chest wall at the sternum; you can often put your finger in a “crater” on the underside of the chest, just in front of the belly button area. A small crater is not concerning; a large crater creates problems for heart and lung development as the kittens and puppies grow.

The repair for a large deformity is best/only performed when the animal is still young and bones are soft. The sternum and ribs are manually pulled outward and secured to an external chest splint by large sutures; if necessary, the sutures are tightened over 1-2wks to further pull the chest wall out to a normal shape.

Once the sternum and ribs are in a normal position, they are allowed to mature in the splint so the chest wall stays in a normal shape after everything is removed.

**“Why is this procedure being recommended for my pet?”**

In severe cases of pectus excavatum, the chest cavity is divided almost in half by the abnormal sternum and ribs. The lungs and heart and great vessels can be compromised, causing problems with breathing and exercise intolerance. Correcting the abnormality when still young and growing, a patient can return to relatively normal function and lifespan.

**“What options do I have to treat my pet’s condition?”**

The minor surgery plus chest splint treatment is the only corrective option for this condition. No medical treatment is also an option, but may result in varying degrees of disability and shortened lifespan depending on the severity of the abnormality.

**“What postoperative complications do I need to know and understand when considering this surgery?”**

Breathing abnormalities are the most common postoperative complications. These are uncommon and usually not overly concerning, but can be life threatening. If your pet appears in distress or is having any difficulty moving around and eating/drinking, seek veterinary care urgently.

**“Are there situations when the surgical outcome is not what we hoped it would be?”**

If a patient is older and the bones are not flexible, the defect may not straighten out fully. Usually there will be some degree of correction, enough to make lung and heart function improve to near normal.

**“How is my pet’s life and lifestyle likely to change after this procedure?”**

For the time period when your pet is wearing the chest splint, activity must be kept to an absolute minimum. After the restricted period, your pet can return to typical pet activities.

**“Are there things I can do to prepare myself, my home and/or my pet for this procedure?”**

Having a safe and functional place to keep your pet restricted may need some planning. A large dog kennel, a small bathroom, a baby playpen, all can be useful spaces for the restricted time of recovery.

**Outpatient surgery and anesthesia** can be uncomfortable, painful, disorienting, and frustrating experiences for animals; watching your pet work through the early postoperative period and recover from anesthesia and pain medications can be worrisome, scary and frustrating for pet owners. The vast majority of the time this period of difficulty is brief, and *your pet is actually more comfortable and secure at home with you*. Sometimes it doesn't feel like that at two in the morning when your pet is anxious and not consolable, and you are unsure of what to do. You always have the option of transporting your pet to a 24-hour veterinary facility postoperatively. If you do not want to have your pet home in the first few days postoperatively, please advise your primary care veterinary staff. They will provide contact information for a local 24-hour veterinary facility and help get an estimate for the ongoing care.

It is important that you have proper expectations about this procedure; your experience and your pet's outcome will benefit greatly. Please discuss this information with your veterinarian when working through the decision-making process regarding **Pectus Excavatum**.

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