



MEGAESOPHAGUS

ABOUT THE DISEASE

The esophagus connects the mouth to the stomach through the chest cavity. This thin tube of muscle moves food and water by contracting muscles in a rhythmic pattern called peristalsis.

Megaesophagus is an enlargement of the esophagus causing an inability to move food and water into the stomach. This disease places patients at risk for inhaling water or food contents into the lungs causing aspiration pneumonia.

This disease is seen more in canine patients and there are several causes for **megaesophagus** that differ based on age. These include:

- In puppies, a heart defect called persistent right aortic arch, can clamp, and constrict the esophagus.
- Some patients can develop an autoimmune condition called myasthenia gravis, which causes a relaxation and dilation due to a loss of muscle tone.
- In more advanced cases of acid reflux disease, the esophagus can become inflamed (esophagitis), which can cause a temporary relaxation of the esophagus. This can be seen in patients with feeding tubes.

Symptoms include:

- Vomiting or regurgitation
- Excessive drooling (hypersalivation, ptyalism)
- Coughing, nasal discharge, respiratory noises
- Failure to grow
- Extreme hunger

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

An x-ray (radiograph) of the chest is the most reliable non-invasive choice for ruling out **megaesophagus** as well as aspiration pneumonia. Sometimes patients are given a contrast material to swallow during an x-ray series to find the dilated esophagus.

Endoscopy may be required for a definitive diagnosis.

Specialty blood testing may be required to rule out myasthenia gravis.

The disease is typically diagnosed in later stages.

TREATMENT

Direct treatment for the esophagus is difficult once in later stages of **megaesophagus**.

Indirect patient treatment is aimed at secondary manifestations such as aspiration pneumonia, weight loss, and regurgitation.

Many patients are placed on a gruel diet of moistened/blended dog food, and then fed from an elevation to aid in proper movement of food into the stomach.

There is no direct treatment, only management of symptoms and an end goal to maintain body weight.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Rule out any other conditions to potentially lessen the effects of **megaesophagus**.