URINARY PROBLEMS IN DOGS

What is it? In dogs, lower urinary tract disease may be caused by inflammation, bacterial bladder infections, bladder stones caused by infections or by metabolic problems, or bladder tumors. In some dogs, abnormal urinary anatomy contributes to problems. Some dogs that do not have medical problems may urinate in inappropriate places for behavioral reasons, such as incomplete training, anxiety or urine marking.

Who gets it? Many female puppies suffer from puppy vaginitis, which is an irritation of the sensitive tissues of the vagina. As adults, females are more susceptible to bacterial bladder infections because the passageway from the bladder to the outside world is shorter than in males, sometimes allowing bacteria to invade. Metabolic problems that can cause bladder stones are seen in Dalmatians, and a condition called portosystemic shunt, seen most commonly in small breeds such as Yorkies, can also result in stones. Bladder tumors are seen in older dogs, often females. Small breed dogs are harder to housetrain than larger ones as a general rule, and may be more prone to having urine “accidents” in undesirable places. Dogs that have been adopted as adults, especially from a shelter situation, may be more likely to have some forms of anxiety disorders such as separation anxiety. Male dogs, especially those that have not been neutered, are more inclined to mark their territory by urinating.

What are the clinical signs? Lower urinary tract signs usually include increased frequency of urination, sometimes including urinating in inappropriate places. Dogs may seem painful when they urinate. Blood may be seen in the urine. Occasionally, urinary obstruction will occur, causing straining and abdominal pain. Dogs who are urine marking or incompletely housetrained may show no particular clinical signs other than urinating in inappropriate places. Dogs with anxiety disorders affecting their urination will often show other signs of stress such as panting, barking, or chewing objects around the same time as when they urinate inappropriately.

How is it diagnosed? A physical exam and urinalysis can identify many causes of urinary tract disease. X-rays and ultrasound are used to identify stones and tumors. Urine culture is an important part of treating a bacterial infection. Occasionally, bloodwork, cystoscopy or other tests are needed. Behavioral problems are identified by the history reported by the owner and by ruling out medical problems.

How is it treated? Puppies who suffer from sterile vaginitis will often outgrow it. Bacterial infections are treated with antibiotics and pain relievers. Some types of bladder stones can be dissolved with special diets and medication, while others must be surgically removed. Bladder tumors may be treated with surgery and chemotherapy. Neutering a male dog in youth reduces, but does not eliminate, his drive to mark his territory; neutering a dog after he is mature may make no difference. Other behavioral problems may be treated with special training, management techniques, and sometimes medication.
What is the aftercare? When giving a course of medications such as antibiotics, it is important to follow directions to make sure the condition is cleared up, and to keep any follow-up appointments for monitoring. Dogs that have had surgery will need a couple of weeks of rest with a careful eye kept on their incisions while they heal. To prevent recurrence, Dalmatians who have formed urate stones often need to be on a special diet.

What is the prognosis? Unfortunately, some dogs are prone to developing bladder infections or bladder stones and may have repeated problems. Prognosis for bladder tumors is poor overall since they will tend to recur or spread. Many dogs with behavioral problems that cause inappropriate urination respond very well to training and management.