

# Newsletter of the COMMUNITY PRACTICE SERVICE

College of Veterinary Medicine, Washington State University  
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Fall 2006

## Laryngeal Paralysis—When a Dog Has Trouble Breathing

Dogs often breathe hard during strenuous exercise, hot weather, or when they are excited. If heavy breathing is accompanied with a voice change, excessive panting, or a roaring or gasping sound when breathing in, the dog may have a paralyzed or partially paralyzed larynx.

A normally functioning larynx or voice box will open when an animal breathes in and close when it is eating and drinking. For a dog with laryngeal paralysis, the muscles that connect to the larynx stop opening and closing, making its airway narrower than it should be and harder for the dog to get enough air. Occasionally, some dogs experience episodes in which the larynx closes so tight that they have an extremely hard time breathing and may even lose consciousness from lack of air. If this is the case, owners should seek veterinary assistance immediately.

Other dogs may experience only mild symptoms, especially if they have a sedentary lifestyle. Dogs with laryngeal paralysis may also cough or gag when eating, and sometimes may aspirate food into the lungs, which may cause a life-threatening case of pneumonia.

In most cases, the cause for laryngeal paralysis is unknown, but it most commonly occurs in middle-aged to older large breed dogs such as Labrador retrievers and Irish setters.

"Sometimes it is associated with hypothyroidism, neurologic diseases, or trauma, but very often we cannot identify a cause," said Dr. Bonnie G. Campbell, of the small animal soft tissue surgery service at the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital. Overweight dogs may also experience more problems with laryngeal paralysis. "The condition can take time to develop, but owners should get suspicious when they see their dog breathe with more effort on inspiration, often with a wheezing noise," she said. "Sometimes there will also be a change in their voice or bark."

Such was the case for "Teddy," a 12-year-old Labrador retriever owned by David and Ruth Rice of Pullman, Washington. "Her owners began to notice a noise when she

was breathing that got steadily worse over the period of a year and a half," said Dr. Raelynn Farnsworth, a Community Practice veterinarian at WSU who helped diagnose Teddy in January 2006. "She was also gagging about once a week, and her breathing got worse when she was excited or exercised."

Dr. Farnsworth suspected laryngeal paralysis, but ran several tests to rule out a mass in the throat or bronchitis, which may produce similar symptoms. When the test results came back normal, Teddy was sent to the WSU soft tissue surgery service for examination with a laryngeal scope.

"To clarify a diagnosis, we put the dog under very light anesthesia and look at the larynx through its mouth with a lighted scope," Dr. Campbell said. "The anesthesia is light enough so that the dog's larynx would still be able to work if it could. Then we watch them breathe to see if the larynx is moving every time the dog inhales or if it just sits there. If it just sits there, that confirms our diagnosis of laryngeal paralysis."

Fortunately, surgery can be performed to help a dog that has a paralyzed larynx. "It is a common surgery we do here at WSU, but because it is technically challenging, we get a lot of referrals for it," Dr. Campbell said.

The surgery involves placing a suture in such a way that it opens up one side of the larynx so the dog has a bigger opening to take air in through. "We only suture one side of the larynx because that opens it enough to relieve the dog's symptoms without hopefully opening it enough to lead to aspiration," she said.

"We don't do surgery on all dogs with this problem because of that risk," Dr. Campbell said. "With a bigger opening for the dog to breathe through, it may aspirate or inhale food more easily into the lungs, which can lead to pneumonia. There is about a 10 to 25 percent



Tessa—a chocolate lab, a breed commonly affected by laryngeal paralysis

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To make an appointment call:  
509-335-0711

Remember to sign up online at the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine web site to keep receiving the WSU Community Practice Service newsletter free via email. Instructions for doing so can be found on the last page of this newsletter, as well as information about receiving a hard copy by paid subscription.

It's free, so don't be left behind at the starting gate! Hard-copy mailings to non-subscribers will end on January 1, 2007, so be sure to reply soon!

### In this issue:

Laryngeal Paralysis.....	1
WSU's Service Soft Tissue Surgery....	2
Fall Weather Pet Tips .....	3
Why Does My Pet Eat Grass? .....	4
Beaver Grows Toothy Grin Back.....	4
Veterinary Teaching Hospital and Community Practice .....	5
WSU Community Practice News at the Speed of Light .....	6

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Continued on page 2

## Washington State University's Soft Tissue Surgery Service

The soft tissue surgery service at WSU is made up of a versatile team of board-certified surgeons. These skilled surgeons can perform a variety of surgical procedures on many different organs and parts of the body to help many different animals.

"We see a wide range of cases for surgery for problems in the chest, abdomen, skin, mouth, and just about anywhere in the body," explained Dr. Bonnie G. Campbell, DVM, Ph.D., DACVS (Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons) of WSU's small animal soft tissue surgery service. "We do a large portion of all surgeries except for bone, joint, and back problems, which are seen by the orthopedic and neurologic services here at WSU," she said. "It's a nice variety, which I really enjoy."

The service treats up to 20 animals weekly—mostly dogs and cats, but also exotic animals. "Recently, we took bladder stones out of a turtle," Dr. Campbell said. "We've also done surgery on iguanas, birds, alpacas, llamas, and potbellied pigs. They are certainly by no means common, but they are interesting when they happen."

Dr. Campbell and Dr. Boel Fransson, DVM, Ph.D., DACVS, are the service's two surgeons, and together perform oncologic, gastrointestinal, liver, cardiovascular, respiratory, urogenital, plastic, and reconstructive surgeries. The team also includes three surgical residents, Drs. Michelle Powers, Pilar Lafuente, and David McCormick, and surgical technician Jennifer Nosakowski. In addition, four to six veterinary students train with the service during two-week rotating periods.

Animals are referred to the soft tissue service from private veterinary practitioners, as well as from internal specialists at the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital and the WSU Community Practice Service. The soft tissue surgery team is also available around the clock for surgical emergencies.

"As board-certified surgeons, we have had extensive surgical training, and we tend to do more complex procedures than most private practitioners perform," Dr. Campbell said. "Some of the special things we do include laser surgery and minimally invasive surgery using laparoscopic and thoracoscopic instruments to diagnose and treat animals without having to make a large incision. We also treat a lot of animals with wounds that are hard to heal or need special reconstructive surgery."

"A new technology we are excited about performing involves placing stents to hold open collapsed or narrowed areas, such as the trachea, urethra, and colon," she said. "We also do a lot of surgeries for cancer patients."

In addition to surgery, the service is involved with the diagnosis of a pet if needed, educating owners before a surgery, and intensive post-operative care. Most patients have blood work done before they undergo anesthesia. Many also have



The WSU Soft Tissue Surgery Team

radiographs, ultrasound, CAT scans, or MRI images taken to insure the surgeons have the most accurate information to make the best plan for a surgical procedure.

"Our job goes beyond performing surgery," Dr. Campbell said. "We spend a fair amount of time with owners in the exam room talking with them about their pet's condition and what the various options are for treatment, both medical and surgical. We also discuss in depth the surgical procedure, what to expect, how long the pet may be at WSU, and what care will be required once the pet goes home."

"We speak with our clients every day, either on the phone or when they are visiting, to keep them updated on their pet's progress," she said. "Even after the pet is discharged from the hospital, we keep in contact with them—we guide them through the whole procedure. Being a surgeon is very rewarding because you can fix a lot of problems and make a very positive impact on the lives of the pet and the client."

### Laryngeal Paralysis *continued from front page*

chance of that happening after the surgery over the lifetime of the dog."

What often determines whether or not a dog has surgery is the level of activity it is used to. "A dog that is a couch potato and can keep cool in hot weather may not need the surgery," Dr. Campbell said. "Active dogs tend to benefit the most, and the change is pretty remarkable. In some dogs, you hear them inhaling with much effort with every breath and then after the surgery they are able to breathe so much more comfortably. It can really make a dramatic difference."

Teddy was one of those dogs. The surgery greatly improved her breathing, but she also had post-operative complications from aspirating food into her lungs one night after she had gone home. "Her owners are very caring people and brought her in to the teaching hospital right away," Dr. Farnsworth said. "She got pneumonia, but we were able to successfully treat that. She is a really sweet dog and is much happier now that she can breathe better."

Even though the surgery immediately improves a dog's breathing, it still cannot open its larynx as wide as normal, and recovery may take up to two months. "Highly active dogs may not be able to be quite as active as they were before the laryngeal paralysis, but most dogs are able to return to normal activity," Dr. Campbell said. "Weight loss is also important for overweight dogs that have had the surgery."

For more information about laryngeal paralysis or the surgery, contact the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0711.

## Fall Weather Pet Tips



### Seasonal allergies

Common allergens that affect dogs and cats in the fall include molds from dying leaves and decaying plants and ragweed pollen, which can be especially heavy from the end of August through October. Signs of allergies in pets include inflamed, itchy skin (can lead to infections or a skin condition called atopic dermatitis), coughing, sneezing, wheezing, and excess discharge from the nose and eyes. A veterinarian can prescribe medicine to help with allergic reactions when they occur. To help reduce allergic reactions, pet owners can bath and brush down a dog or cat that has been outdoors once they come inside.

### Hiking

Hiking is a great autumn activity, but be sure to plan for yourself and your pet. Must-have items include a leash and collar to restrain a pet if it is injured or if you encounter hazards on the trail. You should also have a first aid kit that includes sterile bandages, gauze, disinfectant, and surgical tape. Also bring insect repellent for fleas and ticks, and enough water for both you and your dog as streams and standing water may contain bacteria and common algae that can sicken or kill a dog. You may also want to carry pet snacks, as well as an extra leash and collar. Dogs can get lost in unfamiliar surroundings, so make sure your pet has redundant identification, such as an ID tag on the collar and an identification microchip.

If a pet gets a severe cut while on the trail, place a clean cloth over the wound and apply pressure for several minutes without removing the dressing. Every time you remove the dressing to look at the wound, it disturbs the clot and the process has to start over again. Try to elevate the wound, and

add more cloth if the first one soaks through, but do not remove what was already applied. Do your best to get your pet to a veterinarian as quickly as possible. If no accidents occur, check paws for thorns and other material that it may have picked up after the hike. Grass awns are especially hazardous and can easily slip beneath the dog's foot skin and cause an infection. Check early and check often to remove them. Lastly, dogs need conditioning like people, so if your pet is mostly sedentary, limit the hike to a few miles or take conditioning walks for a couple of weeks before your adventure.

### Hunting Season

With the arrival of hunting season, make sure pets are in safe areas and cannot be mistaken for game. Many find an orange collar and bell to be effective safety measures. If your dog hunts, make sure to apply tick control and that it is vaccinated for leptospirosis, a serious bacterial disease in dogs that can potentially spread to people. Sources of a "lepto" infection include pond water or puddles contaminated with the bacteria from wildlife urine, so hunting dogs are in greater need of vaccination. Owners should also check their dogs over daily for sporting injuries and foreign objects such as grass awns that may become lodged in the feet, ears, eyes, and nose.

### Holiday foods

Halloween is a time when costumed strangers ring doorbells and bowls are filled with tempting candy. Keep your pet in a safe place during Halloween and away from candy. For anxious pets, make a quiet room available where pets will not get scared or loose. Remember that chocolate can be toxic to pets and ingestion of candy can result in an upset stomach and diarrhea. Traditional Thanksgiving dinner foods can also lead to gastrointestinal illness in our furry friends. It is best to keep your pet's normal diet the mainstay during the holidays.



## Why Does My Pet Eat Grass?



Many dogs and cats eat grass from time to time, and some do it regularly. But what people, including veterinarians, do not know is why.

“There is no scientific answer for this, and no one has ever proven any theories about why dogs and cats eat grass,” said Dr. Raelynn Farnsworth, a WSU Community Practice veterinarian who is frequently asked about this issue. “But

it usually does not mean there is something wrong with the animal.”

There have been many theories over the years as to why dogs and cats eat grass. Some possible explanations are that they need roughage in their diet, are hungry, are trying to pass a hairball, have an upset stomach and are trying to induce vomiting, had an upset stomach and are trying to calm their stomach, have a vitamin or mineral deficiency, eat grass that another animal urinated on, or just plain like the taste and texture.

“Nobody actually knows, but there are many opinions,” Dr. Farnsworth said. “There have not been any studies that I’m aware of that tell us why dogs and cats eat grass, but it seems that for some pets, it may be normal behavior.”

There is no reason to worry unless a dog or cat eats so much grass it won’t eat normal food or vomits too much, or if it ate grass recently treated with fertilizer and pesticides. When applying chemicals or fertilizer, be sure to follow label instructions for use and disposal carefully on the container, or contact the company for any questions.

If pesticide poisoning is suspected, contact your veterinarian immediately. In case of an emergency, contact the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0711.

## Beaver Grows Toothy Grin Back



Bailey

A beaver that lost her front teeth after being struck by a car has plenty to smile about. Veterinarians at Washington State University say all four of her front teeth have re-grown, and her recovery went so well that she was returned to the wild in early July.

The 41-pound juvenile beaver was struck accidentally by a motorist this past spring near Lewiston, Idaho.

The accident resulted in the young female breaking off her four front teeth and suffering numerous bruises and scrapes.

At just one-and-a-half years old, the beaver, nicknamed Bailey, recuperated nicely at WSU’s College of Veterinary Medicine. “I was really pleased with Bailey’s progress,” said Dr. Nickol Finch, who heads up the zoonotic medicine service for WSU’s Veterinary Teaching Hospital. “A beaver’s front teeth grow constantly throughout their life, and all four of her front teeth grew back and are at a healthy length.”

A big concern during Bailey’s recovery was her weight. “Bailey dropped quite a bit of muscle mass,” said Angela Teal, a veterinary technician in the WSU teaching hospital.

For exercise, the beaver spent a few hours a day in a hydrotherapy sink, and was eventually allowed to go outside for some exercise. “She gained some weight, and ate vegetables, fruit, dandelions, bark, and sticks,” Teal said. “She recovered more quickly than we originally thought she would.”

The juvenile beaver was released back to the wild near Clarkston, Washington, on July 7. “I really expect her to do well,” Dr. Finch said.

All four of Bailey’s new teeth are orange. The orange color comes from the replacement of calcium in the tooth enamel with iron. This enables the teeth to stay constantly chisel-like and sharp.

The WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital treats hundreds of wildlife cases each year with no “owner” to pay the bills. Support for the animals often comes from donations, while the veterinary care is provided with the dual goal of treating and releasing wild animals whenever possible as well as training the next generation of veterinarians who will carry on this important work.

The Exotic and Wildlife Service and the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital specializes in taking care of and rehabilitating wild birds, raptors such as eagles and owls, reptiles, and mammals such as rabbits, mice, raccoons, and squirrels. This service also treats pet birds, ferrets, snakes, fish, and other nontraditional pet species.

## Why Come to WSU's Veterinary Teaching Hospital and the Community Practice?

Every day, veterinarians at WSU's College of Veterinary Medicine provide state-of-the-art medical care for animals and return them to their caring owners. From dogs, cats, and horses to parakeets, cattle, alpacas, llamas, and iguanas, animals from all walks of life are treated in our world-class clinical teaching facilities.



The Washington State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital (VTH) is open to the public without a referral 24 hours a day. It is a full-service hospital and referral center for the Pacific Northwest and western Canada. The teaching hospital is also part of the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences, one of three academic departments in the College of Veterinary Medicine. The hospital offers services to both large and small animals, as well as to some nearby livestock units.

The VTH is a state-assisted \$38 million facility that opened in September 1996. Each year, about 15,000 animals are treated here. The nearly three-acre facility encompasses the hospital, clinical laboratory, and epidemiological surveillance service, all under one roof. The central core provides space for surgery suites for small and large animals, clinical pathology, seminar rooms, administrative areas, reception, special medicine and diagnostic areas, and the state's only pharmacy dedicated exclusively to animals.

The VTH enjoys the finest medical imaging capabilities available to veterinary medicine worldwide. WSU is one of the most advanced veterinary hospitals in the world with such sophisticated systems as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computerized tomography (CT scan), and nuclear scintigraphy (bone scanning). In addition to these services, ultrasound, endoscopy, arthroscopy, laser surgery, and therapeutic technologies including surgery, medical management, and radiation therapy are available.

Specialized medical treatments in certain areas are also available at the VTH. These include cancer treatments that involve advanced surgical techniques, radiation therapy provided by the college's \$2 million linear accelerator, chemotherapy, and palliative care.

Client animals are treated by renowned specialists who are in the process of training compassionate and capable future veterinarians. Faculty in the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences conduct research to enhance current knowledge of diseases, diagnostics, and treatment. WSU veterinarians have made recent advances in the diagnosis and treatment of brain tumors, neurological problems, and canine osteoarthritis. They've conducted field disease investigations affecting herds and flocks, and expanded our knowledge of exercise and cardiac physiology as well as the passive transfer of immunity.

The Community Practice at WSU offers primary veterinary care to animals owned by the public. It operates much like a private veterinary clinic. Examinations and treatments proceed more slowly than in private practices, however, because of the increased attention given to patients associated with training third- and fourth-year professional students and postgraduate students. A team approach including faculty, residents, students, and staff is used to evaluate patients.

The Community Practice has in-house consultation services available for specialized diagnostic tests and treatments, including radiographic imaging, such as CT scans or MR imaging, and cancer treatment.

### Hours of Operation

The Veterinary Teaching Hospital is open for large and small animal appointments from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Emergency care service is also available for large and small animals on a 24-hour basis. Clients with animals in need of emergency care should call the hospital at 509-335-0711 before arrival.

### Fees

Fees on par with private practices are charged for all services provided by the VTH, with payment due in full at the time of service. Clients with animals treated as outpatients will be given an estimate of the cost before the service is provided, with payment due upon completion of the visit.

Clients with hospitalized animals will also be given an estimate, with prepayment of half the estimate due upon admission. The other half is due when the animal is discharged. Special payment plans may also be arranged.

### Directions

The WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital is located on the Washington State University campus in Pullman off Stadium Way and Grimes Way across from Lighty Student Services Building. To get to the hospital, turn right off of Stadium Way heading east onto Grimes Way. Then take the second right-hand turn heading south on Ott Way where a brown sign on the corner says "Veterinary Hospital."

### Hospital Switchboard

Small animal appointments.....	509-335-0711
24-hour emergency service.....	509-335-0711
Veterinary Hospital Fax.....	509-335-3330



Dr. Matthew Mickas examining a patient.