

Mansfield Animal Clinic

1260 North Main Street, Mansfield Animal Clinic, TX, 76063

Phone: 817-473-1012

Fax: 817-473-1315

Email: admin@mansfieldanimalclinic.com

Website: www.mansfieldanimalclinic.com

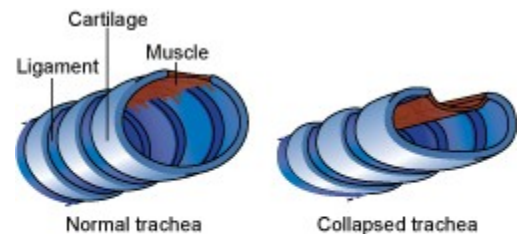
Tracheal Collapse in Dogs

What is a collapsing trachea?

The *trachea*, or windpipe, is the tube connecting the throat to the lungs. Small rings of cartilage along the tracheal wall maintain the tube shape. In the dog, these rings do not completely encircle the windpipe, but only cover about 5/6 (83%) of the circumference. A thin membrane of tissue completes the circle. If the cartilage loses some of its turgidity or the membrane becomes slack and sags, the tracheal rings will flatten when air is drawn into the airway during inspiration. This is called *tracheal collapse*. It makes it difficult for air to get to the lungs.

Are certain breeds more often affected?

Yes, Chihuahuas, Pomeranians, Shih tzu's, Lhasa apsos, toy poodles, and Yorkshire terriers are often affected with tracheal collapse. Because of that, we suspect a genetic factor is involved. It is important to note that tracheal collapse can occur in all dogs, regardless of size or breed.



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What age does tracheal collapse usually occur?

Most dogs are middle-aged to elderly (4-14 years) but some dogs are much younger.

What are the clinical signs?

"The most common clinical sign is a persistent, dry, harsh cough... described as a "goose honk" cough."

The most common clinical sign is a persistent, dry, harsh cough. It is sometimes described as a "goose honk" cough. The cough may worsen at night, with excitement, pressure on the trachea as from a leash, in hot or humid weather, or immediately after eating or drinking.

How is a collapsing trachea diagnosed?

During a physical exam, very light pressure placed on the trachea that causes coughing or breathing difficulty can raise a suspicion of collapsed trachea. Other tests such as radiography (x-rays) or use of an endoscope or bronchoscope are needed to confirm the diagnosis.

Are there other conditions that can be similar to collapsing trachea?

Other causes of coughing, including congestive heart failure, must be ruled out. Sometimes heart disease and collapsed trachea are present at the same time.

How is collapsing trachea treated?

"Collapsing trachea can be treated medically, surgically, or by a combination of the two."

Collapsing trachea can be treated medically, surgically, or by a combination of the two. Your veterinarian will discuss the various treatment options. Even with good control, most dogs will continue to experience at least some coughing throughout life. Surgical correction is complex, and the procedure is typically performed only by an experienced board-certified surgeon. Newer implant materials and techniques promise hope for dogs affected by the condition.

What can I do to help my dog?

Weight reduction is important to reduce the severity of symptoms caused by a collapsing trachea. Prevent over-excitement and use a harness rather than a collar. Antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs may be intermittently needed.

"A recently published study indicated that a high percentage of dogs with collapsing trachea also had concurrent liver disease."

A recently published study indicated that a high percentage of dogs with collapsing trachea also had concurrent liver disease. Therefore, all dogs with collapsing trachea should have their liver function monitored closely. Your veterinarian will provide specific treatment advice to help with your dog's condition.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM
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