

Pet: Arthur

Age: 6 months

Problem: Intussusception

Diagnosis

Arthur's owner had brought him in to see the vet after he had been sick several times at home. Arthur had started to be sick over the course of the day and then stopped eating or drinking, but continued to be sick. If your pet continues to be sick despite not eating or drinking they need to be checked over, as this can be sign of something more serious than just a stomach upset.

After an initial check Arthur's temperature was found to be high (a high temperature is usually the sign of an infection.) The Vet felt Arthur's abdomen, he was very tense and eliciting pain and the vet could feel a mass. Unsure of what the mass was she suggested it would be best to give him a light sedation, so he would relax and the mass would be easier to palpate and also to keep him still whilst a radiograph of his abdomen could be taken.

As we did not know at this stage whether the mass was a foreign body (an inedible object lodged in the intestines,) an intussusception (the intestines prolapsing back into the lumen of the adjacent part of the intestine, see picture 2,) or a tissue growth, we did not want to compromise Arthur by giving a standard sedation or anaesthetic. A very safe light sedation was given that did not have any affect on the heart and only lasted for approximately 10 minutes. When the sedation had taken effect the Vet palpated the mass again, she found it to be hard and immovable. A radiograph was taken which showed trapped gas in the intestine. Either a foreign body or an intussusception could have caused the trapped gas, either way only surgery would resume normal intestinal movement. The owner agreed for us to go ahead with surgery, as Arthur was young and healthy and he had a good chance of full recovery with either scenario.

Treatment

Arthur was put on intravenous fluids to stop his blood pressure dropping whilst under anaesthetic. If the blood pressure drops below a certain level it compromises the blood flow to the kidneys, if compromised for too long it can cause renal failure. He was given a general anaesthetic and prepped and scrubbed for an exploratory laparotomy (examining the contents of the abdomen.) The Vet quickly located the mass and found it to be an intussusception. Sometimes they can be manually reduced, by delicately teasing the intestine out of itself. In Arthur's case it was irreducible. The intussusception will stop anything moving further along the intestinal tract and trap potentially harmful bacteria. This section of intestine had to be removed. To make the surgery more difficult the prolapse had occurred where the small intestine meets the large intestine. This meant that when the mass was removed the two portions of intestine left would be different diameters, which required a skilful surgeon to stitch the two back together. Intestinal surgery of this kind generates the risk of peritonitis as leakage can occur post surgery. The intussusception was examined post surgery to check why it would not reduce. In this case the portion of intestines that had been pulled back into the adjacent intestinal tissue had had its blood supply cut off and consequently died, the oxygen starved tissue had caused the mass to become so hard.

Recovery

Arthur was awake very soon after surgery. Within the hour he was moving around in his kennel. Cats generally do not enjoy a hospital environment and returning him home as soon as he was able was a priority to ensure a good recovery, as stress can affect the immune system. Arthur slept most of the night and seemed very comfortable the following morning. He was hospitalised for two days following surgery as his temperature was still a little high and he had produced some bloody faeces. He was treated with oral antibiotics, which he took very well. On the third day he was allowed home on a bland diet. A change of antibiotics saw his temperature return to normal and he was purring for the first time after surgery.

3 weeks on and Arthur has made a full recovery.

Intussusceptions are more common in adolescent animals. They can wax and wane and resolve with time whilst others need surgical correction. The true reason intussusceptions occur is unknown but in many cases it can be attributed to intestinal worms. This was not the case for Arthur as he was up to date with worming treatments.