



Cheat Grass Abscesses

Cheat grass has many names -foxtails, grass awns, etc. It is the seed head from an invasive grass. These awns are arrow shaped and have very sharp needle-like ends that easily puncture the skin. The arrow shape allows the awn to migrate into the body and move around. This causes severe pain and inflammation. These areas often become infected. An abscess will typically form around the grass awn. Abscesses are pockets of white blood cells (immune system cells) or “pus”. This is how the body tries to get rid of invasive foreign bodies.



Because the grass awn can migrate, it can be difficult to pinpoint exactly where the awn is located within the tissues. It can scar into the tissues or migrate between important structures like tendons or blood vessels.

Treatment

The awn(s) need to be removed. Dr. Parish will clip the affected area and clean the abscess. She can often just use local anesthesia (lidocaine block) to lance open the abscess pocket and remove the awn. Occasionally, she will need to sedate or anesthetize your pet for this procedure. The pocket is then flushed with antiseptic and cleaned well. Dr. Parish is not always able to find the foreign body. It may have been licked out, ruptured out, or migrated further into the body. It may be scarred into the tissues or up against important structures like tendons or blood vessels. If an awn is not retrieved from the area, close monitoring is very important. If the area swells or a new swelling near the original area pops up it needs to be lanced and explored as soon as possible.

Home Care

If your pet had an abscess lanced and flushed the area will need to be soaked in warm Epsom salt water for 5 minutes twice daily until healed. If the area is not available for soaking, warm pack it instead. Use a soft cloth soaked in hot Epsom salt water to warm pack the area. This will keep the tissues soft, clean, and help with infection and comfort.

Dr. Parish may prescribe an antibiotic and/or anti-inflammatory to help with healing and comfort. It is very important to prevent your pet from licking the irritated areas. Saliva has enzymes that break down tissues and bacteria that keeps the wound infected. The tongue will keep the wound open by preventing the skin from growing back together. Please keep a cone on your pet until the wounds are healed!

Common places cheat grass is found:

Between toes.
Armpits. Ears. Eyes.
Scrotum. Vulva.
Anal gland pores.
Up the nose.
In the gums, cheeks,
and tonsils.

Prevention

Prevention is always better than cure! Keep tall grass mown down so awns cannot develop. Avoid exploring areas that have lots of cheat grass. Have your pet's paws clipped short so the fur doesn't collect awns. This will also make it easier to check for and remove awns. Use a fine-toothed comb to remove cheat grass from the hair.

It was such a pleasure to care for your pet today.

Please call with any questions or concerns.

Gooding Veterinary Clinic ♥ (208) 934-5626.