

SURGEON ON SITE – Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome Surgery

Your vet has arranged for us to see your pet to perform surgical procedures to reduce respiratory obstruction caused by the condition “brachycephalic obstructive airway disease/syndrome (B.O.A.S.)”. This information sheet provides you with some further information about the surgical treatment of this condition.

What is BOAS?

BOAS is a combination of upper airway problems seen in dogs that are bred to have short noses (e.g. Pugs, French Bulldogs, English Bulldogs). This causes an excess of soft tissues in the upper airways that obstructs breathing.

What are the structures affected?

The nostrils may be narrow or completely closed. The soft palate (at the back of the mouth) may be too long and get sucked into the larynx (voicebox) when your dog breathes in. Sometimes the tonsils are large and inflamed and protrude into the throat. Finally, the larynx (voicebox) may start to collapse inwards due to the low pressures in the airway.

Dogs affected with BOAS may have some or all of these problems, and this causes obstruction to breathing through the upper airway. You may see this in your dog as snoring during sleep, and snorting/wheezing when awake. Exercise may become difficult, and your dog may find hot conditions particularly troublesome as they cannot cool themselves effectively by panting. Sometimes, breathing problems start to affect eating and swallowing, and your dog may find it difficult to eat comfortably or may regurgitate food or froth after eating.

What surgery is recommended?

Before deciding on the exact procedures to perform, we will examine your dog’s airway under anaesthesia. We will look at the larynx to see if there is any evidence of laryngeal collapse. We will then do surgery to widen the nostrils and to shorten the soft palate as required. Sometimes we remove the tonsils and any redundant tissue in the larynx.

What is the recovery time?

Dogs usually recover very quickly from this surgery. They should be rested for 7 days post operatively but thereafter can be treated normally. Some dogs also require treatment for pneumonia or other associated conditions.

What are the potential complications of this surgery?

There are a number of potential complications with upper airway surgery:

- very delicate sutures are used in the nasal tissue and it is possible for these to be damaged or become loose requiring replacement under a second anaesthetic.
- there is a small risk of aspiration pneumonia after this sort of surgery – this is where food or liquid is inhaled into the airways rather than swallowed; symptoms can range from a mild cough, to those requiring treatment, to more severe complications requiring urgent attention
- there is a potential for the tissues in the back of the throat to swell following surgical treatment; in severe cases, this can obstruct the airway and require further surgical

intervention such as placement of a tracheostomy tube (tube directly into the airways via the throat)

- rarely, death can occur as a result of multiple severe complications with this surgery. Any surgery on the breathing system is inherently risky as any complications can become rapidly fatal.

Although complications after this surgery are uncommon, it is very important to understand that the nature of our service means that we cannot provide urgent or emergency follow-up care at your practice. For instance, if your pet required a tracheostomy after surgery, there might not be a suitably experienced person available at the practice to perform it. If you are concerned about this, then you should speak to your vet about the possible alternative hospitals where these procedures can be done.

We assess patients very carefully, and if we feel your dog is a “high-risk” case then we will generally suggest that the procedures are done in a hospital environment with appropriate 24-hour care available. However, even patients that we feel to be “low-risk” can still suffer life-threatening complications.

AFTERCARE:

As long as your dog recovers well from surgery, we will normally aim to discharge them from the practice the day of surgery. Dogs are usually happier and more relaxed in their home environment, and minimising stress is a particular concern after surgery on the airway.

Following this, patients should have restricted exercise for at least 7 days, and should wear a buster collar if possible to prevent self-trauma of the stitches in the nose. Your pet will be discharged with some pain relief and well as possible courses of antibiotic, anti-inflammatory or antacids as required. We will discuss these with you at the time.

Thank you for entrusting the care of your pet to us and I look forward to speaking to you on the day of the surgery.

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