

Abortion, Termination of Pregnancy

Basics

OVERVIEW

- “Abortion” is the delivery of one or more fetuses before it is (they are) capable of surviving outside of the uterus; a “fetus” (plural, fetuses) is the unborn young (that is, still in the uterus)
- Intentional medical or surgical termination of an unwanted pregnancy in a dog; may be accomplished by using drugs that prevent establishment of a pregnancy and/or cause termination of an established pregnancy, or surgery to terminate an established pregnancy
- The “bitch” is a female dog
- The “queen” is a female cat

SIGNALMENT/DESCRIPTION OF PET

Species

- Dogs
- Cats

Breed Predilections

- Unwanted pregnancy in any breed

Predominant Sex

SIGNS/OBSERVED CHANGES IN THE PET

- Depend on the stage of the pregnancy (gestation)
- May have no visible signs of pregnancy loss if early
- Discharge of fluid or developing fetus(es) from female genital canal (vagina)

CAUSES

- Altering the transport of the fertilized egg through the oviduct (the tube running from the ovary to the uterus)
- Medically stopping development of the “corpus luteum” or “yellow body” in the ovary that produces the female hormone progesterone, which supports and maintains the pregnancy
- Inhibiting the production of progesterone, the female hormone that supports pregnancy
- Using a drug to block the effects of progesterone, the female hormone that supports pregnancy

Treatment

HEALTH CARE

- Inpatient care is preferred to allow for monitoring of the pet; the pet should be monitored for possible side effects of medications (such as vomiting, passing of stool or urine, increased salivation, increased breathing and/or heart rate) for 30–60 minutes after certain medical treatments
- Many accidentally mated dogs do not become pregnant; therefore, treatment may not be necessary
- Determining pregnancy status in the early stages is difficult because ultrasound confirmation of pregnancy is not possible until ~4–5 weeks after breeding
- Medical treatment done early in the pregnancy may not be as effective as later treatment; however, treatment later in pregnancy (mid-gestation) may lead to more discharge and possible visually detected passage of fetuses



ACTIVITY

- No need to change the pet's activity following medical treatment
- Activity and exercise is restricted for several days following surgery if ovariohysterectomy (spay) is performed

DIET

- Avoid feeding prior to each medical treatment and for 1–2 hours after medical treatments—reduces nausea and vomiting
- Follow feeding instructions before and after surgery if ovariohysterectomy (spay) is performed

SURGERY

- If breeding is not a consideration or future litters are not desired, ovariohysterectomy (spay) may be the best option

Medications

Medications presented in this section are intended to provide general information about possible treatment. The treatment for a particular condition may evolve as medical advances are made; therefore, the medications should not be considered as all inclusive

- Prostaglandin F_{2α} or PGF_{2α} (Lutalyse®)—causes breakdown of the corpus luteum with subsequent decrease in progesterone levels and causes cervical relaxation and uterine contractions
- Cloprostenol—may be used in combination with cabergoline, bromocriptine, aglepristone
- Bromocriptine—causes abortion and inhibits hormone, prolactin, that stimulates milk production; may be used in combination with other medications
- Cabergoline (Dostinex)—causes breakdown of the corpus luteum with subsequent decrease in progesterone levels; may be used in combination with other medications
- Dexamethasone—mode of action not known
- Mifepristone (RU486) or aglepristone—blocks the effects of progesterone
- Acycline, in clinical trials for prostate cancer in men

Follow-Up Care

PATIENT MONITORING

- Examination of uterus using ultrasound to confirm emptying of uterine contents after medical management

PREVENTIONS AND AVOIDANCE

- Surgical sterilization (ovariohysterectomy or spay) for bitches and queens not intended for breeding
- Confine bitches and queens intended for breeding during heat cycle and observe carefully to avoid accidental breeding
- Walk bitches on leash during heat cycle

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Pregnancy termination may not be achieved after one treatment protocol; continuation or change in treatment protocol may be necessary
- Post-operative problems may occur following ovariohysterectomy (spay)

EXPECTED COURSE AND PROGNOSIS

- Medical treatment may shorten time until next heat cycle in bitches
- Queens may resume estrous behavior 7–10 days following pregnancy termination
- Fertility is not affected with medical treatment to terminate a pregnancy
- Ovariohysterectomy (spay) will eliminate heat cycles and fertility

Key Points

- If breeding is not a consideration, ovariohysterectomy (spay) may be the best option
- Discuss all treatment options, including potential side effects, with the veterinarian, and come to a mutually agreeable treatment plan