

Umbilical Hernias

An umbilical hernia is a condition in which abdominal contents (usually fat but possibly intestines etc.) push out past the wall of the abdomen at the belly button.

The umbilicus, or belly button, is where the umbilical cord attaches when the puppy is in the womb. The umbilical cord carries nutrition and oxygen from mother to the unborn puppy. Waste products and carbon dioxide are taken away from the unborn puppy to the mother. Normally, after the puppy is born, the cord breaks, and the connection at the umbilicus closes up.

An umbilical hernia occurs when the hole doesn't close correctly. When this happens, skin is the only barrier between the abdominal organs and the environment.

Umbilical hernias are diagnosed on physical examination.

Most hernias are small, do not usually cause any problems, and are often left untreated. They often look like a pea or grape under the skin, and may pop in and out depending on the puppy's position or how full the tummy is.



Small Umbilical Hernia

Large hernias are less common. They should be repaired surgically, because there is a risk that the abdominal contents inside the hernial sac could become damaged or strangulated. Strangulation of intestinal loops can cause blood flow restriction to the intestine, intestinal blockage, etc. Strangulated hernias can become life-threatening; signs can include a large, warm hernia sac; vomiting; abdominal pain; lack of appetite; and depression.

As long as the hernia isn't causing problems for the puppy, any hernia repair surgery can usually be delayed to coincide with any other procedures to be done under general anaesthetic (for example spaying or castration). This means the puppy will only need one general anaesthetic. However, if strangulation occurs, emergency corrective surgery will be required.

The exact cause of congenital umbilical hernias is unknown, but it is generally thought to be a hereditary condition. Dogs with a hernia should not ideally be bred from. There are no known links to any other problems, and puppies with hernias are usually as healthy as those without.