

Struck By A Car

DEALING WITH EMERGENCY INJURIES

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Lucky is a mixed breed dog who gets REALLY excited when the mailman comes around every day. One day, Lucky was able to squeeze past his mom and out the door as the mail truck passed by, and was hit by a car coming down the street behind the truck. Lucky's mom immediately took him to her family veterinarian, where he was diagnosed with a fractured left front leg and a suspected diaphragmatic hernia. Lucky was referred to a board-certified veterinary surgeon, and happily, was able to get all of his injuries repaired without incident!

Lucky's situation is all too common for many patients after being hit by a car. Many of the injuries when an animal is hit by a car are obvious - fractures, lacerations and abrasions. However some of the most serious injuries that can be sustained after trauma (such as being hit by a car) are internal, and are much more difficult to diagnose and treat. In Lucky's case, the internal injury was a diaphragmatic hernia.

Diaphragmatic hernias often occur after trauma and involve the diaphragm - the sheet of muscle that separates the chest and lungs from the abdominal cavity. When this muscle is torn, as is possible when the patient is hit by a car, it is possible for the abdominal organs and intestines to herniate, or move through the tear in the diaphragm into the chest cavity. When

this occurs, it is called a diaphragmatic hernia. Less commonly, diaphragmatic hernias can be a congenital defect, and can be asymptomatic for months or years.

Diaphragmatic hernias can be difficult to diagnose, and some patients will not show symptoms for several days. When symptoms begin to appear, whether it is immediate or delayed, veterinary care should be sought immediately. If abdominal contents enter the chest, it can cause



respiratory distress, vomiting, lethargy, and irregular heartbeat. Surgical repair of the hernia is necessary to repair the tear in the diaphragm, however, it is imperative that the patient is stable prior to surgery. For many traumatic hernias, breathing and heart rates need to be normalized before anesthesia should be attempted. In these cases, it is even sometimes necessary to wait for up to 24 hours for the patient to be stable enough for anesthesia. During surgery, the surgeon will evaluate the

diaphragm, find the tear, return any abdominal contents to the abdominal cavity, and suture the tear closed. Any organ or intestinal damage can also be evaluated at that time and repaired surgically if necessary.

Unfortunately, there are many potential injuries for pets who are hit by a car, so if you see an animal struck by a car, they should be taken for an evaluation by a veterinarian immediately. Pets can go

into shock just like people do after trauma, and just like in people, when pets go into shock it can be life-threatening! Having a plan in place for emergency situations like this is one of the best ways to be able to stay calm and get your pet the medical attention he or she needs. Many veterinary practices have an emergency number or work with an emergency clinic.

Making sure your family is aware of the emergency veterinary information and location is a crucial part of being able to respond quickly in a critical situation. Talk to your family veterinarian about their emergency services, or who they recommend in case of emergency. Also keep in mind that if your pet has been hit by a car in the past, they will NOT remember to keep out of the street! Take precautions to prevent your pet from getting into the street again, and keep everyone in your family safe.