Home Care for Total Ear Canal Ablation Surgery

Your pet had a total ear canal ablation and subtotal lateral bulla ostectomy. The infected tissue and entire ear canal were removed and the boney portion of the ear (bulla) was opened to remove all of the infectious tissue from around the hearing apparatus. Bacterial cultures were obtained so that the infection may be treated with the appropriate antibiotics. On occasion, biopsies may be indicated to identify abnormal tissue in the ear. Drains are placed to encourage healthy tissue growth without abscess pocket formation.

The surgery is usually successful in alleviating the painful, debilitating chronic ear infections, as they cannot recur once the ear canal has been removed. Fortunately, hearing loss, which is directly related to the severity of the infection within the middle ear, is not always associated with this surgery. Dogs frequently retain some degree of hearing capacity, even without ear canals, and are much more comfortable.

Temporary post-operative facial nerve paralysis, which is the most common complication of total ear canal ablation, occurs in almost half the cases with only 5 to 10% of the patients having permanent damage. The more severe the ear disease, the greater the risk is of this problem. The facial nerve wraps around the base of the ear canal and is important for function of facial muscles. Many times the chronic ear infection causes scar tissue to entrap this nerve making surgical dissection very challenging. If this nerve is inadvertently bruised from the surgery your pet will not be able to close the eyelids, and the lips will appear droopy on the operated side. Eye drops may be required to prevent drying of the eye until the nerve palsy has resolved. In most cases, facial nerve paralysis is a temporary problem and resolves within 2 months.

Pain upon opening the mouth or difficulty chewing can occur if the joint of the jaw, which is located just in front of the middle ear, gets inflamed from middle ear infection or from surgery. This problem typically resolves within 2 weeks.

Horner’s syndrome is where the pupil becomes constricted and third eyelid covers part of the eye. This syndrome is caused by damage or inflammation of the sympathetic nerve that runs through the middle ear. This is an unusual complication as the nerve is fairly well protected in dogs.

Vestibular syndrome (balance problems) can occur as the balance organ is located in the inner ear. Less than 2% of patients develop this problem, but it is more common in those patients that have had previous balance problems or a head tilt.

Swelling after surgery is may occur and be due to oozing of blood or accumulation of clear fluid at the level of the ear. In some cases that swelling occurs shortly after surgery and results in swelling in the throat region which results in breathing difficulty. If this occurs, a breathing tube may need to be placed until the swelling goes down. In severe cases, a temporary tracheostomy (tube placed through neck region) may be needed. This is an uncommon complication occurring.
in about 5% of the patients and usually does not result in death.

Recurrent infection is an uncommon complication, usually due to unresolved infection at the level of the middle ear or ascending infection from via the auditory tube, and may require a second surgery to clean the bulla.

Follow Up Instructions:

☐ Apply an ice pack (frozen peas or corn) to the incision for 5-10 minutes three times daily for the first three days
☐ Apply a moist hot pack (wet dish towel warmed in microwave, check temperature on forearm before applying to skin) to the incision for 5-10 minutes three times daily for the next week
☐ Call your doctor in five days for the results of the culture/sensitivity test to find out if you need to change antibiotics
☐ Call your doctor if you notice any severe swelling or discharge from the area (some mild swelling is normal)
☐ Recheck in ten days: Sutures/Staples removal / Dissolving sutures
☐ Recheck every 2 weeks after suture removal to evaluate progress
☐ Tegaderm clear bandage can be left on until it falls off or at suture removal
☐ Start antibiotic tonight
☐ Start pain medication tonight
☐ Please use an Elizabethan Collar on your pet after surgery if trying to scratch at incision
☐ Start Keflex Clindamycin Baytril Ciprofloxin tonight and give for 14 days
☐ Start Rimadyl Metacam Previcox Derramax Zubrin pain medication tonight and give for 14 days (refill if limp worsens after running out for as long as it is helping)
☐ Start Tramadol pain medication tonight and give for 3-5 days (refill if limp worsens after running out for as long as it is helping)