

Toby is a 5 year old chocolate Labrador who came to see us as he had been vomiting and behaving strangely. As soon as he came in it was obvious that Toby was very poorly. He was in a lot of pain to the point where he was struggling to sit comfortably. An examination showed that he had a very painful abdomen.

We decided to do X rays immediately and the images showed a lot of gas in the intestines. An obstruction of some kind was suspected and Toby's condition was deteriorating rapidly. It was clear that emergency surgery to explore his abdomen was required and Toby was quickly anaesthetised and we started surgery.



When Andy had opened Toby's abdomen and completed the initial observations it became apparent that his colon (or large bowel) had twisted. This condition is known as Colonic Torsion and is extremely rare (we had never seen one before!) and extremely dangerous. Even with surgery the prognosis is still guarded and survival is by no means certain. It is unclear what causes this condition or indeed, the similar Gastric Dilated Volvulus or bloat that we have highlighted in our Summer newsletter, but large breeds do tend to be more prone to such conditions.

Toby's x-ray shows hugely dilated colon filled with gas (visible as big black sausage shaped structures)

Torsion surgery itself is complicated as even though untwisting the colon is relatively simple, the procedure carries risks including perforation of the colon and subsequent life threatening peritonitis. Even with successful surgical intervention, if blood supply to the organs has been compromised then the affected organs will no longer be able to function and recovery becomes increasingly unlikely. It is therefore essential that this condition is treated immediately to improve the chances of survival. Toby's colon was sutured to the wall of his abdomen (known as colonopexy) to prevent it twisting again.

Following surgery, Toby recovered well from the procedure but due to the seriousness of his condition he required intensive aftercare at the Royal Veterinary College in London. He was slowly weaned off the robust medication that he had been given to help keep him comfortable and returned home 4 days later. Throughout his ordeal, despite being very ill and in a lot of pain, Toby has been exceptionally brave and co-operative and has never once lost the humour, charm and kindness we so often associate with Labradors.

Symptoms of this condition are varied and include vomiting, discomfort and pain. Of course, these symptoms can apply to a wide range of conditions, most of which can be easily managed but it is vital that owners are aware of their animals 'normal' behaviour as changes in habits or demeanour are perhaps the most vital, obvious and serious sign that something is wrong and should never be ignored.



Toby is going from strength to strength and we are sure you will join us in wishing our 'Braveheart Award' winner a continued recovery.