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Endoscopy and laparoscopic surgery – What is it and why is it better than standard surgery?

Endoscopy is a general term for procedures that use long telescopic cameras and instruments that are inserted into body cavities to examine tissues, obtain biopsies or perform surgical procedures. Depending on the organ or space where the cameras are inserted, the name of the procedure changes. For example, laparoscopy involves placing the camera in the abdominal cavity, gastroscopy - into the stomach, cystoscopy - into the bladder, vaginoscopy - into the vaginal canal, arthroscopy – into a joint, rhinoscopy – into the nose, and otoscopy – into the ear. The procedure is then visualized on a television monitor with significant magnification. Often, the cavity is inflated with air, gas or fluid to enhance visualization. In some cases, addition of air or gas may not be necessary (ears, nose). Then the surgeon uses long instruments as an extension to their hands to perform the surgery or procedure. Some of the telescopes are rigid and some are flexible and this depends on what organ is being evaluated.

The benefits of endoscopy include better visualization with much greater magnification, smaller incisions, faster healing times, and in some situations, shorter surgical times, while in others surgical time may be longer but control of bleeding and visualization of tissues may be less making it worth the extra time. In some cases, procedures may be done in an awake patient rather than undergoing anesthesia (transcervical insemination versus surgical insemination for example). These surgeries are called minimally invasive surgeries because of the small incisions and faster recovery times. These procedures may result in safer surgeries for some patients and may allow for better treatment of some conditions because of the improved visualization of the interior of the body cavity or organs.

Common procedures include laparoscopic or lap-assisted procedures such as spays, cryptorchid surgeries, prophylactic gastropexies (stomach tacking for large breed, deep chested dogs), intestinal, liver and pancreatic biopsies, bladder stone removal, small tumor removal from abdominal organs, simple intestinal foreign body removal, as well as some other more complicated abdominal procedures.

The use of the endoscopic equipment is more expensive than open surgical procedures because of the specialized equipment and additional training required. Because of the added expense, this type of surgery may not be indicated in some situations, but it may be desirable in others. These procedures are not offered in all veterinary clinics and some of the surgeries may be referred to a boarded surgeon because of the infrequency of performing them and the need for advanced training to manage the cases after surgery (i.e. adrenal tumors, kidney tumors, gall bladder disease). If your pet needs surgery, please discuss with your veterinarian if one of these laparoscopic procedures may be of benefit to your family pet.

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