

Foxtails can Present Medical Complications -Lyons Redstone Review

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As you may have noticed already this year, as grass and weeds on the plains start to dry the fuzzy little seed head (also called a foxtail or grass awn) begin to attach themselves to clothes, hair and the fur of your four-legged friends. Some plants that produce foxtails are native species while many are weeds that are encouraged to grow alongside foot traffic of humans and domestic animals. Foxtails can detach and stick to a person's clothes or an animal's fur. Dogs tend to be more greatly affected because they don't groom as much as their feline counterparts. Generally, foxtails are a minor nuisance, but if they become trapped in your pet's fur they can easily become lodged in the skin and potentially migrate to other parts of the body.

Once embedded, foxtails can cause infections, abscesses or, more seriously, migrate internally. Migrating foxtails have been found in sinus cavities, the inner ear canal after penetrating the eardrum, the spine, the urethra, internal organs such as lungs and even the brain. Unfortunately, foxtails cannot be easily imaged with x-rays or ultrasound. They are very small and locating them may be a painful, difficult and expensive procedure; surgical removal or endoscopy (using an endoscope to look down the throat, nasal cavity, esophagus, or trachea) may be required. Another potentially severe complication can occur if a pet chews on foxtails. They can easily become lodged in the throat causing coughing, gagging, gulping or swallowing repeatedly.

Do your best to prevent foxtail infections and emergencies by removing foxtail producing weeds from your yard and by avoiding areas with grassy weeds when out and about with your dog. Also discourage your dog from chewing or eating dried grass/foxtails. As it is not always possible to avoid foxtails, check your pet's skin and fur daily. Brush their fur, check between toes, in ears, under armpits and in the groin area. Long-haired dogs' fur can be trimmed between their toes and pads to lessen the chance of foxtails becoming embedded.

If you find a foxtail sticking out of the skin, pull it straight out --taking care not to break the tip off. If it is already deeply embedded in the skin or you find a painful infected lump anywhere on your dog, prompt veterinary treatment is recommended. Sedation and a local anesthetic may be required in order to remove the foxtail, and your pet most likely will be sent home on systemic antibiotics. Foxtails in the eye or eyelid may be readily visible, but do not attempt to remove it as this can cause more damage. Other symptoms that may indicate a foxtail problem include pawing at the face, eyes or ears; coughing; shaking; tilting their head; or biting/licking the groin area. If you note any of the above symptoms, get your dog to a veterinarian immediately.

AMVS is a 24-hour veterinary facility providing specialty internal medicine, surgery, emergency and critical care, physical rehabilitation, pain management, and blood bank services for pets. They are located in Longmont at 104 S. Main St. For more information, go to www.AspenMeadowVet.com.