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# Ovarian Cysts in Guinea Pigs

## Basics

### OVERVIEW

- Ovarian cysts are nonfunctional, fluid-filled cysts that can develop spontaneously on the ovaries throughout the female guinea pig's reproductive cycle.
- Cysts often secrete female hormones such as estrogen in normal or excessive amounts, leading to irregular reproductive cycles, persistent heat, and infertility.
- Cysts can become quite large, and range in size from that of a small pea up to 2–3 inches, with larger cysts forming in older females.
- Single or multiple pregnancies do not appear to influence cyst development or size.
- Fertility is reduced in affected females over 15 months of age.
- Potentially serious uterine disorders (such as cystic uterine disease, uterine infection or uterine cancer) can occur in conjunction with cysts.

### SIGNALMENT

- Can occur in any breed, but Hartley, Abyssinian, and crosses of these two strains are more commonly affected.
- Seen more often in middle-aged to older females; up to 76%–88% of females over 18 months of age have cysts. As age increases, cyst size also increases.

### SIGNS

- Some animals have no signs of disease (known as asymptomatic)
- Progressive hair loss over the flanks and abdomen, without itching or abnormal appearance to the skin is the most common symptom
- “Pear” appearance to the body conformation because of abdominal enlargement with normal sized chest area
- Decreased fertility in older sows
- Mounting and other sexual behaviors
- Vaginal bleeding
- Lack of appetite

### CAUSES

The precise cause of development of ovarian cysts is unknown.

### RISK FACTORS

Intact (not spayed) females



## TREATMENT

### APPROPRIATE HEALTH CARE

Permanent treatment is to surgically remove cystic ovaries and uterus. Surgical removal of uterus is recommended because hormonal changes that accompany ovarian cysts often cause disease in the uterus. If the guinea pig has additional medical conditions or if surgery is not an option, then medical treatment is often a temporary and palliative therapy.

### ACTIVITY

Restrict in the immediate postoperative period until the incision has healed.

### DIET

Make sure that the guinea pig continues to eat during treatment to prevent potentially dangerous gastrointestinal disorders (GI stasis, bacterial overgrowth).

### SURGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The treatment of choice is ovariectomy (remove ovaries and uterus) because it provides resolution of the current problem and prevents recurrence.

## MEDICATIONS

Medications presented in this section are intended to provide general information about possible treatment. The treatment for a particular condition may evolve as medical advances are made; therefore, the medications should not be considered all-inclusive.

- Hormone therapy can provide temporary resolution. Several treatments have been successful, including injections of leuprolide acetate (Lupron) once every 3 weeks, gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) injections every 2 weeks for two treatments, or human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) injections every 7–10 days for three treatments. These injections tend to be painful, and sedation or brief anesthesia may be administered during the injection process.
- Pain medication is administered in the immediate postoperative period. Injections may also be painful; meloxicam is often given orally for 1–2 days following injection.

## FOLLOW-UP

### PATIENT MONITORING

- Ensure gastrointestinal motility by making sure the patient is eating, well hydrated, and passing normal feces.
- If medical treatment is elected, monitor for regrowth of hair and return of normal body shape.

### PREVENTION/AVOIDANCE

Ovariectomy is the only effective prevention.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Postoperative gastrointestinal ileus may take days to weeks to resolve.
- Return of symptoms of ovarian cysts with medical treatment

### EXPECTED COURSE AND PROGNOSIS

- The prognosis following surgical removal of ovaries and uterus is fair to good.
- With medical treatment, cysts may return.

## KEY POINTS

- Ovarian cysts may develop spontaneously in intact (nonspayed) female guinea pigs.
- Permanent treatment requires surgical removal of the ovaries and uterus (spay). Many guinea pigs respond for long periods to medical treatment with various hormone injections, sometimes coupled with removing fluid from the cysts with a needle (aspiration of fluid).

# Notes

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