

Informed Consent

Subtotal Colectomy (Removal of the Majority of the Colon)

You have elected to have your pet undergo a surgical procedure called a subtotal colectomy. The goal is to remove the dysfunctional (or nonfunctional) large intestine (colon) that has been causing severe constipation, called obstipation, that has led to a condition called mega colon. The outcome is most often far better post op than it was before surgery, and the complication rate is quite low (15%), however, a few of the complications can be very serious or life-threatening. Below, general risks of abdominal surgery are outlined, followed by those specific to subtotal colectomy. Let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

Abdominal Surgery Risks

Skin incision infection- this is a risk with any surgery, and usually treatable with oral antibiotic therapy

Damage to abdominal structures- this could cause bleeding, or contamination by contents of the intestines

Adhesion formation (scar tissue formation in the abdomen)- scar tissue can impact the tissues in the abdomen in the future

Abdominal wall dehiscence (opening)- this can occur when the incision line used to close the abdominal wall fails. At first, the abdominal contents may stay covered by skin and subcutaneous tissue and revision is recommended. If they are not covered, emergency intervention is required.

Abdominal foreign body- very rarely, sponges or even instruments can be left in the abdominal cavity during surgery. We take precautions to ensure this doesn't happen, but it is possible.

Subtotal Colectomy

Intra-operative contamination- the colon is packed with more bacteria than any other part of the intestine. Surgery opens the colon, and if there is too much contamination from the colon into the abdomen, that could lead to severe infection (peritonitis) and the infection can be so severe and rapid that therapies may be fruitless.

Leakage from the intestinal incision site (dehiscence)- if the incision in the intestine leaks after surgery, the intestinal contents end up in the abdomen and that causes irritation and infection. As mentioned above, the severe contamination provided by the colon is most often life-threatening.

Recurrence of constipation- there is invariably a small amount of colon left after surgery. If there is enough colon left, there may be some constipation after surgery. Usually this can be medically managed, but in some cases, revision surgery is recommended

Diarrhea- one of the functions of the colon is to remove water from the feces. If the colon is gone, that function isn't present. The remaining intestine does adjust over time, but often a very soft stool is the end result.

Intestinal Stricture- opening and closing of the intestine is pretty straightforward, but healing can impact the diameter of the inside of the intestine (lumen) due to scar tissue. If a stricture forms in the weeks to months after surgery, it has the potential to cause its own problems, leading to partial obstructions and revision surgery may be recommended.