

Elongated Soft Palate





What is an elongated soft palate?

This condition refers to a longer than normal soft palate at the back of the throat.

In humans we know the soft palate as the dangling section when you open your mouth wide and look in the back of your throat. Dogs and cats have this section as a complete flap that runs across the throat.

In most animals it only hangs down enough to prevent food and water being coughed out the nose, but in some it hangs down and can actually contact the bottom part of the throat.

What breeds are affected?

Breeds effected by an elongated soft palate are usually those with a brachycephalic or pushed in face look such as the Pug, Shitzu, Chihuahua and Bulldog. Many smaller breeds like the Silky Terrier and Maltese also show this problem.

Clinical signs of the elongated soft palate include:

- A cough
- A gag when drinking water
- A gag when getting excited
- A reverse sneeze noise
- Snoring



How does the problem occur?

The problem occurs because the long soft palate becomes lodged in front of the epiglottis.

The epiglottis is the flap of firm tissue that sits in front of the trachea and prevents food and water going down the wrong tube. Food and water is normally pushed over the top of the epiglottis so that it can proceed down the oesophagus.

When the soft palate becomes stuck on the epiglottis, the animal must cough and swallow to release it. This usually sounds like a cough, cough then gag.

In the occasional animal, the soft palate can cause some breathing problems.



Can it be alleviated?

If warranted, surgical intervention can help to alleviate the problem.

Candidates for this surgery are selected based on risk vs benefit as many animals can have a full life without requiring surgery.

A general anaesthetic is given and the animal's mouth opened wide to expose the elongated soft palate. The soft palate is then trimmed shorter.

Surgeons prefer different methods of doing this, either by laser to reduce swelling and bleeding, or by cutting with a scalpel and suturing. Pets will need to be kept on some pain relief and may require antibiotics for a week after the surgery.

Post operative swelling can cause a mild discomfort for a few days, from when breathing should be easier, respiratory noise reduced, and less of the cough / gag complex.

soft palate drawing
shannon

Prevention

There are a number of things an owner can do to reduce the discomfort of an elongated soft palate.

- Reduce or keep their weight low
- Only exercise in the cool time of the day
- Encourage slow eating
- Perform surgery if necessary

