

Ovarian Cystic Disease in Guinea Pigs

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KEYWORDS

• Ovarian cystadenoma • Cystic rete ovarii • Alopecia • Ovariohysterectomy

KEY POINTS

- Ovarian cysts are nonfunctional, fluid-filled cysts that develop spontaneously near the ovaries throughout the female guinea pig's reproductive cycle.
- Cysts are associated with elevated hormones, such as estrogen, leading to irregular reproductive cycles, persistent heat, hair loss, and infertility.
- Fertility is reduced in affected females older than 15 months.
- Potentially serious uterine disorders (eg, leiomyomas, uterine cancer) can occur in conjunction with cysts.
- Permanent treatment requires ovariohysterectomy or ovariectomy. Some guinea pigs may respond to medical management with specific hormone injections, sometimes coupled with palliative fluid removal from the cysts.

INTRODUCTION

Ovarian serous cystadenoma or, more specifically, cystic rete ovarii is a commonly seen medical condition of guinea pigs. Reports in the literature have described from 66% to 75% of sows between 3 months and 5 years of age can be affected.^{1,2} One study identified cystic ovaries in 54 of 71 (76%) female guinea pigs aged 18 to 60 months at necropsy.³ Sows aged 2 to 4 years are the most commonly affected and serous cysts can spontaneously develop throughout the estrus cycle. Size of cysts is highly variable, but one report showed a diameter of 0.5 to 7 cm with an increase in size as the animal ages; however, it did not show any correlation between reproductive history and prevalence of cysts (Figs. 1 and 2).⁴ In most cases, both ovaries are affected although the right ovary is more commonly afflicted in unilateral cases. One study suggested serous ovarian cysts are a normal component of the cyclic guinea pig ovary.² Another study identified cystic rete ovarii in 63 of 83 guinea pigs, suggesting an association with spontaneous reproductive tract leiomyomas.⁵

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Fig. 1. Ovarian cyst in a guinea pig.

Examination by light and electron microscopy has shown that a cystadenoma can form as early as 10-days old.⁶

CLINICAL SIGNS

The most common clinical sign, often noted by owners, is progressive hair loss over the flank region (**Fig. 3**) and abdomen, without pruritus or abnormal appearance to the skin. The author has observed alopecia in other locations of the body without skin disease that resolved with ovariectomy in guinea pigs with cystic ovaries (**Fig. 4**). Crusting of the skin around the nipples is commonly observed as well. Many clinicians describe the pear-shape appearance of the body conformation looking from above the guinea pig because of abdominal enlargement with a normal-sized chest area. Clients may report mounting, aggression, and other sexual behaviors although these can also be observed in unaffected guinea pigs in estrus. Nonspecific clinical signs of appetite loss, lethargy, or vocalization when handled are reported and these require appropriate diagnostic evaluation. Some animals may be asymptomatic and show no signs of disease and cysts are found incidentally at necropsy. Microscopic appearance of the large ovarian cysts suggests reproductive performance in these guinea pigs could be compromised and breeding records indicate that fertility is markedly reduced in affected females older than 15 months of age.³

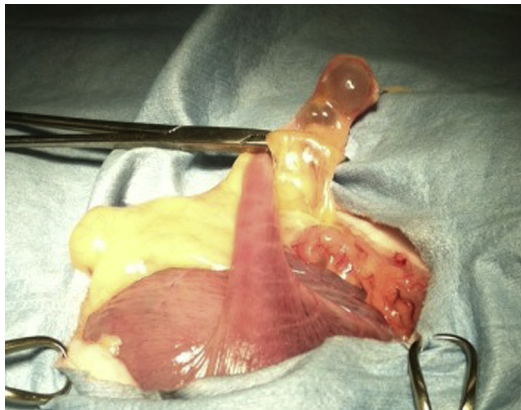


Fig. 2. Ovarian cyst seen at time of ovariectomy with uterine disease identified.

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