

Crash course in pet pig medicine for the large animal practitioner

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Introduction

Many clients treat mini pigs as pets, expecting veterinary care similar to that of dogs and cats. Mini pigs, defined as any pig under 300 lbs. (e.g., Vietnamese Potbelly Pig, Kune Kune, Juliana), require specialized care to address their unique needs.

Mini pig characteristics

Anatomy

Brachiocephalic, quick reflexes, low to the ground.

Growth

Frame growth stops around three years; metabolism slows afterward.

Prey animal

Quick, reactive behavior (e.g., loud screams, fast movement) requires careful handling.

Physical exam and restraint

Vital signs: Temp: 100.5 °F ± 1.5 °F; pulse: 70-120 bpm; respiration: 20-28 breaths/min.

Handling: Physical restraint preferred in non-aggressive pigs under 400 lbs. Avoid getting the pig worked up. Techniques include “the flip,” sorting boards and minimizing flailing.

Chemical restraint

Key rules

- Pigs process alpha-2 agonists poorly.
- Ketamine is acceptable if not the longest-lasting drug.
- Butorphanol and midazolam are essential.
- Gas anesthesia requires pre-medication.
- Use a long needle to reach muscle.
- Wait 10 minutes after injectables before proceeding.

Cocktail list

- Trimming: Midazolam 3ml/100lb IM +/- Butorphanol 1ml/100lb IM.
- Castration: Butorphanol 0.3mg/kg IM, Midazolam 0.3mg/kg IM, +/- Ketamine 4.5mg/kg IM, Isoflurane.
- Spay/Abdominal Surgery: Butorphanol 0.3mg/kg IM, Midazolam 0.3mg/kg IM, Ketamine 9mg/kg IM, Isoflurane.
- Large pig trims: Telazol 1ml/200-400lbs IM, wait 10 minutes +/- Butorphanol/Midazolam combo.

Common procedures

Foot trimming

Tools include a rotary tool, nippers and a dremel. Regular trimming (every 4-6 months) maintains hoof health.

Tusk trimming

Upper tusks (“whetters”) sharpen lower tusks. Lower tusks (“cutters”) need regular trimming with Gigli wire and a dremel.

Neutering

IM sedation followed by a midline incision for testicle removal. Use of anesthesia and antibiotics is crucial.

Spaying

Uterus and ovaries are removed via midline incision. Spaying is recommended after the first heat cycle, at over 20 lbs.

Common health issues

Obesity

Linked to conditions like arthritis and entropion. A diet of reduced pelleted feed and vegetables (e.g., cucumbers, zucchini) is recommended.

Arthritis

Common in the elbow, stifle and digits. Treatment includes corrective trimming and medications such as NSAIDs (meloxicam 1mg/kg, carprofen 4.4mg/kg), gabapentin and Adequan.

Ulcers

Symptoms include inappetence and vomiting. Treatment includes sucralfate, omeprazole and frequent small meals.

Constipation

Typically related to dehydration. Treatment includes enemas, laxatives and fluids.

Upper respiratory issues

Pigs are prone to pneumonia, treated with antibiotics (e.g., Excide, tulathromycin) and steroids (e.g., dexamethasone).

Overheating

Provide shade, misters and airflow. Pharmacological treatments include Banamine S and dexamethasone.

Vaccination protocols

Core

Tetanus toxoid, Rhinishield TX4 (*Bordetella*, *Pasteurella*, Erysipelas).

Optional

Rabies (caution: high reaction rate), leptospirosis (case-dependent).

Conclusion

Mini pigs require specialized veterinary care that includes precise handling techniques, regular hoof and tusk maintenance, tailored chemical restraint, and preventive healthcare. Understanding their unique behaviors and anatomy is key to effective treatment and long-term health.

