Prognosis for Small Bowel Resection
Extensive resection of the small intestine in humans and animals may cause short bowel syndrome (SBS), with its variety of nutritional and metabolic disturbances. Disturbances include malabsorption, weight loss, diarrhea, and fluid and electrolyte abnormalities. In people, it is generally thought that at least 50% of the small intestine must be removed for SBS to develop. This retrospective study was conducted to determine the outcome of extensive resection in dogs and cats and to identify factors associated with outcome. All 7 cats and 8 of the 13 dogs had surgery because of a foreign body. Two dogs had mesenteric volvulus, 1 had intussusception, 1 had dehiscence of a previous surgery site, and 1 had a stromal tumor. In all cases, vomiting was the initial presenting sign. The amount of small intestine removed ranged from 50% to 90% and was not associated with outcome. It has been reported that preservation of the ileocolic valve is important. In this study, a portion of the ileum was resected in only 3 patients and the ileocolic valve was removed in only 1; therefore, the researchers were unable to determine whether removal of the valve had a significant impact on postsurgical health. There was not a significant difference in outcome for dogs versus cats, males versus females, underlying cause of resection, or receipt of parenteral nutrition. Some animals were reported to have soft and/or foul-smelling stools during follow-up. Most study animals were considered to have a good outcome.

COMMENTARY: There are many reasons why small animals have resection of the small bowel, but there is little information in the literature about how these animals actually do long-term. Pet owners should be aware that some problems, such as soft or foul-smelling stools, may not go away. Not all the cases reported here had a positive outcome, but it’s reassuring to note that the majority did.—Patricia Thomblison, DVM, MS