

A Real Case from the Clinic: When a Foxtail Strikes

Boriska is a stunning little dog, a rare and beautiful mix of Pomeranian and German Spitz. He lives in a home with a spacious yard and enjoys his daily walks, sniffing around curiously and exploring with enthusiasm.



Getting to Know the Patient

Boriska was brought to Dr. Sarit Gayer's clinic after his devoted owner noticed that, for two days straight, he had been **rubbing his head against the floor aggressively and generally behaving out of character**.

Although Dr. Gayer is familiar with the owner, a long-time client who lives in a rural area and has two other dogs and dozens of cats, she still performed a full anamnesis to understand what had happened in the past 48 hours that might explain the sudden behavioral changes.

Nothing in Boriska's diet or daily habits had changed. There was no contact with unfamiliar animals, no gastrointestinal abnormalities, and no lapse in routine care. **But one detail stood out:** the owner casually mentioned that Boriska had been on a short walk through a grassy area.

That was all it took for Dr. Gayer to suspect a foxtail.

What Is a Foxtail , and Why Is It Dangerous?



A **foxtail** is a type of grass seed, common in Israel during the spring and summer months. It's long, sharp, and lined with tiny barbs pointing backward ,making it a one-way ticket inward once it penetrates skin or soft tissue.

Foxtails are the reproductive parts of wild grasses like:

- Wild oat (*Avena sterilis*)
- Tabur barley (*Hordeum spontaneum*)
- Wild wheat (*Triticum dicoccoides*)
- Common thistle (though not a true grain, it poses similar risks)
- Syrian thistle (*Acanthus syriacus*)

As these plants dry out, the seeds detach and spread easily, especially in open fields, yards, roadsides, and parks.

The problem? These seeds don't disintegrate inside the body. Their structure allows only inward movement. Once inside, they can migrate deeper, causing infections, abscesses, and sometimes , in rare but serious cases , penetrating into internal organs.

Where Do Foxtails Enter?

The most common sites of foxtail entry include:

- **Between the toes:** from stepping on dry grass
- **Ears:** during sniffing or walking through brush
- **Nostrils :** while smelling the ground
- **Eyes :** slipping under the eyelid
- **Mouth and throat :** from chewing on dried vegetation

How to Identify a Foxtail Injury?

Area	Common Signs	Possible Complications
Ears	Repetitive head shaking, floor rubbing, sensitivity, discharge or odor	Otitis, eardrum rupture, rare brain migration
Nose	Sudden sneezing, nasal bleeding, rubbing the face	Sinus infection, deep nasal tract abscess
Eyes	Tearing, blinking, redness, closed eyelid	Corneal ulcer, partial blindness
Paws	Persistent licking, limping, interdigital swelling	Abscess, deep tissue infection
Skin/Folds	Swelling, localized itching, unexplained sores	Subcutaneous abscess, surgical drainage

The Procedure



Using an otoscope, Dr. Gayer visualized the foxtail deep within Boriska's ear canal. Since it had lodged itself quite far in, she decided to sedate him lightly , not because he was uncooperative, but because it's a delicate and potentially painful procedure.

Dr. Gayer used curved forceps to carefully remove the foxtail. I assisted by holding the otoscope steady during the procedure.

The entire process , from diagnosis to sedation, extraction, and recovery took about 20 minutes.

Boriska was slow to wake, and that moment taught me something important: not all pets recover from sedation easily. Sometimes they need a comforting voice, gentle petting, or light movement to help them fully come back to themselves.

Shortly afterward, Boriska was back on his feet, tail wagging, enjoying his treats and the affection he always receives at the clinic.

How Can Foxtail Complications Be Prevented?

- **Daily checks** of ears, paws, eyes, and nose after outdoor time
- **Routine brushing and inspection** of the coat
- **Avoid dry grassy areas** during foxtail season (spring and summer)

- **Trim fur** around the ears, toes, groin, and belly every 4–6 weeks
- **Visit your vet promptly** if you suspect something is wrong

Final Thoughts

Foxtails may be tiny, but they can lead to serious and painful complications. As a veterinary nurse, I've learned just how quickly a small seed can turn into a big medical problem.

Luckily, Boriska's case had a happy ending. But his story is a reminder for all of us: stay observant, trust your instincts, and don't ignore the little things.

♥ With care, attention, and a good veterinary team, you can keep your pets safe, happy, and healthy.

I'd love to connect with you, feel free to leave a comment on my blog, share your thoughts or questions, offer feedback, or tell me how you'd approach a similar case. You're also welcome to message me directly on Instagram. @shanivetnurse

