

## CUSHINGS DISEASE



If you have any further queries regarding the welfare of your pet, please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff

We are happy to assist!

## What is Cushing's Disease?

Cushing's Disease is a disease in which the adrenal glands overproduce certain hormones. The correct medical term for this disease is *hyperadrenocorticism*.

The adrenal glands produce several vital substances which regulate a variety of body functions and are necessary to sustain life. The most widely known of these substances is cortisol. Either deficient production or excessive production of these substances may be life-threatening.

## How is it diagnosed?

A number of tests may be necessary to confirm a diagnosis of Cushing's Disease and further tests may be needed to decide which form of the disease is present. All these tests involve is taking blood samples, sometimes at timed intervals. Although some of these tests are expensive, they are necessary for a definitive diagnosis. Sometimes an ultrasound examination may be required to eliminate the possibility of an adrenal tumour.

*Closer view of Cushingoid dog's left elbow/ribcage area. Hair loss and thin skin very evident. Note bruising on elbow area.*



## What are the treatment options?

There are three mechanisms by which this disease can occur. Regardless of the cause, the clinical signs are essentially the same. It is important to identify the cause because the various forms are treated differently and have different prognoses.

**1. Iatrogenic Cushing's Disease:** Treatment of this form requires a discontinuation of the 'cortisone' that is being given. This must be done in a very controlled manner so that other consequences do not occur. Unfortunately, it usually results in a recurrence of the disease that was being treated by the 'cortisone'. Because there may have been adverse effects on the adrenal glands, treatment is also needed to correct that problem.

**2. Adrenal Tumour.** Treatment of an adrenal tumour is difficult. Some cases will respond to medication, but many do not. In some cases surgery to remove the tumour is an option, if it is successful and the tumour is not malignant, there is a reasonable chance that the dog will regain normal health.

**3. Pituitary Tumour.** The pituitary-induced form of Cushing's Disease is treated with a capsule called Trilostane (Vetoryl) This reduces excess adrenal tissue. If not enough drug is used, the abnormal tissue persists and the disease continues. If too much is used, most or all of the adrenal cortex will be destroyed, which can be life-threatening. Food and water intake should be monitored. Both should return to a normal level. Normal water intake is approximately 60 ml/kg body weight per day. However water should not be restricted.

## Treatment Considerations

Your veterinary surgeon will have given you precise instructions regarding the medication and when it will be necessary to examine your dog again. However if any of the following occur, please contact your veterinary surgeon without delay:

- a) water intake appears to drop dramatically
- b) appetite drops dramatically
- c) your dog does not eat a regular meal
- d) if any vomiting or diarrhoea occurs
- e) if the patient becomes unusually listless

If any of the above occur it may be necessary to perform a monitoring blood test (ACTH stimulation test). This test should be done early in the morning and will require your dog to be hospitalised for the day or part of the day. If the test is abnormal, the initiating phase will continue. If the test is normal, the maintenance phase will begin.

If any of the above signs occur, further or alternative medication may be instituted without delay. Follow the instructions given by the veterinary surgeon very carefully. If in any doubt at all, contact the practice. It is really important that there is close cooperation between the owner and the veterinary surgeon at the beginning of any treatment for Cushing's Disease.

Report any other changes in your dog's behaviour that are out of the ordinary. The disease and treatment can result in abnormal behaviour. However, your dog can also have other diseases that occur concurrently but independently of Cushing's Disease. It is important that we differentiate between the two situations so that proper treatment can be taken.

Do not despair. Although it is a serious disease, many dogs with Cushing's Disease enjoy greatly improved quality of life for many years.

If you have any queries or would like to know more, please don't hesitate to contact us.