

Cushing's Disease In Dogs

Cushing's disease, also known as hyperadrenocorticism, is a condition where your dog's body produces too much of the hormone cortisol. This condition is fairly common in middle-aged and older dogs. If your dog is showing signs like excessive thirst and urination, hair loss, weight gain, panting, changes in skin appearance, or abdominal swelling, it's essential to consult your vet. While these symptoms can indicate various health issues, they are often linked to Cushing's.

What is Cushing's Disease?

Cushing's disease occurs when the adrenal glands—located next to the kidneys—overproduce cortisol, a steroid hormone essential for regulating various body functions. The pituitary gland, located at the base of the brain, signals the adrenal glands to produce cortisol. If there's a tumour on either gland, hormone production can become excessive, leading to various symptoms.

Most cases of Cushing's disease stem from a benign tumour on the pituitary gland, while tumours on the adrenal gland are less common. In some instances, prolonged use of corticosteroids for treating other conditions can also lead to Cushing's disease.



Symptoms of Cushing's Disease in Dogs

Pet owners often first notice their dog drinking more water and needing to urinate frequently. One common sign is a sudden need to go outside during the night. Other symptoms can include:

- Hair loss
- Weight gain
- Panting
- Changes in skin texture or appearance
- Abdominal swelling (causing a sagging belly)
- Decreased energy levels

Most symptoms are mild, making diagnosis tricky since they can also indicate other health issues.



How Does Cushing's Disease Affect Dogs?

Cortisol is crucial for managing stress; it helps your dog respond to stressful situations by speeding up metabolism and retaining water. However, dogs with Cushing's produce excessive cortisol, which can lead to long-term health problems, including skin infections and an increased risk of diabetes.

Testing for and Diagnosing Cushing's

Diagnosing Cushing's disease isn't straightforward since its symptoms overlap with many other conditions. Your vet will start by reviewing your dog's health history and symptoms, followed by a full physical examination. Blood and urine samples will be needed, and additional tests may be required for a definitive diagnosis.

Treating and Managing Cushing's in Dogs

Treatment options depend on the type of Cushing's disease your dog has. Here are some approaches:

- **Medical Therapy:** Most dogs with a benign pituitary tumour are treated with daily medication to help manage the disease. If symptoms are mild, your vet might recommend close monitoring instead.
- **Surgery:** If the cause is a tumour on the adrenal gland, your vet may perform scans to determine if it's benign or malignant. If it's benign and there's just one tumour, medication and possible surgery to remove it may be advised. However, multiple tumours can complicate treatment options.
- **Steroid-Induced Cushing's:** For dogs that developed Cushing's due to long-term steroid use, your vet will create a plan to gradually reduce the steroid



dosage safely.

Managing Cushing's Disease

While Cushing's disease cannot be cured, it can be effectively managed. Treatment can be costly, and if your dog is on medication, it will need to continue for life. Regular vet visits for monitoring and blood tests are crucial to ensure your dog's safety and the effectiveness of the treatment.

If you suspect your dog has Cushing's disease or notice any concerning symptoms, don't hesitate to reach out to your vet. Early intervention can make a significant difference in managing your dog's health!