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CUSHING'S DISEASE (Hyperadrenocorticism)

Cushing's disease is a disorder of the adrenal glands in which excessive adrenal hormone (cortisol) is produced. The cause of hyperadrenocorticism may be abnormal pituitary gland function, tumors of the adrenal gland, cortisone therapy or unexplained over activity of the adrenal gland.

Hyperadrenocorticism is a slowly progressing disease, and the early signs are often not noticed. These include increased appetite, increased drinking and urination, reduced activity and enlargement of the abdomen. As the disease progresses, these signs intensify, and the pet may become fat, pant heavily and lose hair evenly over each side of the body. In some cases, hair loss may be the only apparent change.

Bloodwork and potentially x-rays or ultrasound are needed to definitively diagnose the condition, find its cause, and plan treatment. Some animals respond to medical treatment alone, while others need both surgical and medical treatment. Unfortunately, some patients grow worse despite treatment. Some pet owners decide to do the bloodwork simply to KNOW one way or the other what is going on with their pet. Others decide that they want to pursue a diagnosis so that they can proceed with treatment. It is important to understand that it takes a committed owner to go forward with treatment because the medication must be given exactly as your veterinarian describes.

IMPORTANT POINTS IN TREATMENT

1. Control rather than cure, is the outcome of treatment in most cases of hyperadrenocorticism. Treatment must be carefully monitored, since the drugs used in therapy may cause underproduction of adrenal hormones and a shock-like state known as an Addisonian crisis.
2. Give all medication as directed. Call the doctor if you cannot give the prescribed medication or if you see any unusual behavior or signs after giving the medication.
3. Dogs with Cushing's disease are prone to getting infections because the excess cortisol (steroid) produced in their body will cause immunosuppression. Urinary tract infections (UTI) are one of the most common manifestations of these infections. Call your veterinarian if you suspect that your dog has a UTI or other infection.
4. Follow the checked instructions
 - Feed the normal diet
 - A special diet is recommended. Feed as follows:

Notify the doctor if any of the following occur:

- Your pet drinks excessively or cannot hold its urine
- Your pet vomits or has diarrhea
- Your pet becomes depressed or weak, or behaves oddly.
- Your pet's skin condition worsens or does not improve.
- Your pet's general health declines.

Treatment with Lysadren:

There are two phases to the treatment of a dog with hyperadrenocorticism: induction and maintenance. Lysadren is an oral medication that works by selectively destroying the portion of the adrenal gland which is producing the excess cortisol. During the induction phase of treatment, your pet will be given Lysadren twice a day for an *average* of 7 days. During the induction period, you will be asked to closely monitor your dog's appetite. Once their appetite has decreased, we will stop giving the Lysadren and will perform a test to determine if we have "damaged" enough of the abnormal adrenal gland. Depending on the outcome of that test, we may need to do further induction or we may be able to go directly to the maintenance phase of treatment. During maintenance, we start your dog on a twice weekly dosage of Lysadren. This medication will need to be given for life and bloodwork will need to be monitored at least every year.

Treatment with Anipryl:

Some dogs (15%) will respond to treatment with Anipryl. Anipryl is an oral medication (pill) that works by decreasing levels of a neurotransmitter in the brain that can be responsible for excessive cortisol secretion. It is important to remember that this therapy will not work in the majority of dogs, but if you feel as though you cannot commit to Lysadren therapy, it may be worth a try.