

Cushings and Addisons

Doggie Diseases That Are Often Not Diagnosed Correctly Right Away: Cushing's and Addison's Disease

Cushing's Disease

Cushing's disease is a common condition in middle aged and older dogs, and it is often mistaken for just 'getting older.' Symptoms include, among others, hair loss and other skin and coat changes, increased urination and water consumption, excess panting, bloated potbelly stomach, and increased appetite.

Cushing's is basically the chronic overproduction of cortisol in the body. It can be caused by a pituitary or adrenal tumor, or by giving the dog too much external glucocorticoid (this later cause is why we need to be careful with steroid drugs like prednisone).

The most common screening tests for the disease are the urine cortisol/creatinine ratio, the low dose dexamethasone suppression test, and the abdominal ultrasound.

Cushing's can be treated. Depending on the cause, surgery, radiation or chemotherapy can be viable options. Drugs commonly used are Lysodren, Ketoconazole and Anipryl. Holistic treatments that can help include Dandelion, a well-known as a tonic for the liver, kidneys and adrenal glands which can help to normalize adrenal functioning, and Burdock, a cleansing and eliminating herb which is excellent at detoxifying the tissues and removing unwanted substances from the body.

Addison's Disease

Addison's disease is basically the opposite of Cushing's disease: underproduction of cortisol in the body. Common symptoms are lethargy, weakness, depression, weight loss, lack of appetite, vomiting and diarrhea, drinking more, urinating more, shaking and dehydration. Symptoms may come and go over months or years, and many of these symptoms can indicate other illnesses, so Addison's often goes unnoticed or incorrectly diagnosed.

During an Addisonian crisis, the patient may go into shock or collapse. Blood work will show low sodium levels, high potassium levels and high kidney enzymes, and many veterinarians will diagnose kidney failure rather than Addison's.

The main test used to properly diagnose Addison's disease is the ACTH stimulation test. Dogs with Addison's disease will have a low cortisol concentration that will not change even after being given a synthetic ACTH (Adrenocorticotropic hormone).

Treatment for Addison's usually consists of medications such as Prednisone and Percorten-V or Florinef. Herbs that can help, in addition, include Licorice, which can help stimulate the adrenal glands, Nettle, Dandelion and Spirulina, which are rich in vitamins and minerals which support adrenal function.