

Does your dog have Addison's disease?

- > **Does your dog have unexplained episodes of diarrhea, vomiting or depression?**
- > **Does he get sick from stress, or stop eating and lose weight?**
- > **Does his energy and enthusiasm wax and wane more than normal?**
- > **Or, is something just wrong, you can see it in his eyes, but you don't have a diagnosis?**

**For more information,
contact Addison Dogs**

website:
www.AddisonDogs.com

or email:
info@addisondogs.com

Support group:
[http://groups.yahoo.com/
group/AddisonDogs/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AddisonDogs/)

What is Addison's Disease?

Addison's disease (hypoadrenocorticism) occurs when the adrenal glands don't produce enough of the hormones cortisol and/or aldosterone. These hormones are necessary for life and have an important impact on every cell of the body.

Hormone production from the adrenal glands declines and eventually stops primarily because of autoimmune destruction of part of the gland. Research shows that it is genetic, but the exact cause is not known.

Symptoms

When the adrenal glands don't produce enough cortisol and/or aldosterone, there are serious consequences. Symptoms may include: digestive upset, including vomiting, diarrhea or constipation; muscle weakness or twitching; a slow heartbeat, arrhythmias or low blood pressure; depression; lethargy; personality changes; anorexia; or sudden weight loss.

In many cases, these symptoms come and go, sometimes as a result of stress, or the dog may respond to treatment with IV fluids and steroids. But left undiagnosed and improperly treated, Addison's can cause a serious health crisis, which requires immediate emergency intervention.

Diagnosis

Addison's disease is often, but not always, indicated by high potassium, low sodium or a low ratio between the two in a standard chemistry panel. Blood work may also show imbalances in kidney and liver values. Because of this Addison's can be misdiagnosed as kidney failure, or other ailments.

If your dog is showing any of the symptoms of Addison's disease, a simple blood test will confirm the diagnosis, or rule it out, before more invasive diagnostic procedures are pursued.

Addison's is confirmed by the ACTH Stimulation (or Response) blood test. This test measures cortisol levels in two blood samples, before and after stimulation of the adrenal gland with ACTH (a pituitary hormone that stimulates cortisol production). In a healthy dog, the cortisol level will be normal with the first draw and will increase significantly in the second draw. A dog with Addison's will have a normal or low level of cortisol in the first draw, and the second draw will show little, if any, increase in cortisol.

Treatment

If the ACTH test indicates that the dog has Addison's and blood tests show that the electrolytes are out of the normal range, two different medications are necessary. If the electrolytes are normal, the dog has atypical or secondary Addison's disease and only needs one medication.

Dogs with all types of Addison's need prednisone or hydrocortisone, either regularly or in times of stress, to replace cortisol. To maintain electrolyte balance, a second medication is given to replace aldosterone. It may be given as either a daily oral medication, fludrocortisone acetate (Florinef), or as a monthly injectable, DOCP (Percorten-V). The cost of these medications can be high, but there are options. One is obtaining fludrocortisone through a compounding pharmacist, which often reduces the cost to less than a third of the price of the name brand medication.

Dogs with Addison's disease will need regular follow-up blood tests to determine if they are on the appropriate medication dosages. These blood tests will be more frequent just after diagnosis and will taper as the dog becomes stabilized.

Expectations

With the proper monitoring and medication a dog with Addison's can live a normal life. Just like other dogs, they can participate in any activities they enjoy.