



Cushing's Disease

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Cushing's disease is a disorder caused by excessive production of cortisol (stress hormone) by the adrenal gland. Cortisol is a naturally occurring steroid that helps the body respond to stress, regulate blood sugar levels, fat metabolism, skeletal muscles, nervous system, kidney function, immune response and the cardiovascular system.

How do pets develop Cushing's disease?

Pets can develop Cushing's disease in one of three ways:

- *Pituitary dependent*- typically caused by a pituitary tumor (about 80%).
- *Adrenal dependent*- is the adrenal form of the disease that is usually caused by an adrenal tumor stimulating an over secretion of glucocorticoids.
- *Iatrogenic*- can occur when the pet has been given high doses of steroids, either by injection or orally. This form of the disease will reverse as soon as the steroids are discontinued.

What to look for?

The symptoms of Cushing's disease commonly mimic other diseases and are often mistaken for normal signs of aging. Since these symptoms gradually occur, it is important to know the typical

signs that are associated with Cushing's disease.

- Excessive thirst
- Excessive hunger
- Increased urination
- Lethargy
- General muscle weakness
- Enlarged, sagging abdomen
- Hair loss
- Thin, fragile, darkly pigmented skin
- Excessive panting

How to diagnose Cushing's disease?

Diagnosing Cushing's disease can be difficult, especially in the early stage of the disease. Your veterinarian will need to perform several lab tests which may include a complete blood count, internal organ function screen, urinalysis, ACTH stimulation test, a dexamethasone suppression test and possible X-rays and /or abdominal ultrasound to assess

your pet's total body function.

Treatment for Cushing's disease?

There are several different treatment options. Depending on the type of disease, surgery can be performed. Medical management is the most common treatment for the majority of canine Cushing's disease.

What if left untreated?

Cushing's disease will progress into life-threatening disorders such as kidney and liver failure, congestive heart failure, or diabetes, as well as a host of other chronic infectious ailments.

If your pet has been diagnosed with Cushing's disease and started on medical management, it is important to obtain frequent recheck examinations to assess your pet's response to therapy.

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