

Golden Retriever With Fatigue

Fatigue can be a sign of a more serious problem.

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Q. My otherwise healthy, happy and energetic Golden Retriever, Ginger, has recently been very fatigued and inactive. She is 18 months old and, just two weeks ago, would go all day, playing and running and the like. Now, she sleeps too much, and has to lie down after playing for a few minutes. I'm very concerned, because Ginger is a great dog. She went to the vet about one month ago, and was healthy. She has no hip or bone problems that I can see-she's just tired. Do you have any idea what this could be?

A. I am also worried about Ginger, without even seeing her. You probably already know this, but you should schedule another appointment with your veterinarian ASAP for a workup.

In the meantime, here are some possibilities that come to mind: Congenital heart disease: A sudden change in energy level and an inability to exercise in a young dog could point to a heart problem that she was born with, but is just showing up now. The way to diagnose this is with a good history (do her gums ever turn a purplish color?), a good exam (does her heart have an irregular rhythm or weak pulse), an EKG (just like in people), possibly chest X-rays to look at the size and shape of the heart, and finally, an echocardiogram. An echocardiogram is an ultrasound of the heart that shows its contracting ability, and also its internal architecture. Some congenital heart conditions can be fixed with surgery; others can be treated with medications, with variable success. A hormonal imbalance, such as Addison's disease: Some dogs can suddenly become weak and lethargic when their adrenal gland malfunctions, and they start losing salt in their urine. Their potassium levels also go up dangerously high, and their levels of cortisol (steroids) in the blood are low. Signs of Addison's Disease are weakness, lethargy, excess water intake and urination, and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea. It is diagnosed with blood tests, including a general panel to look at sodium and potassium, and then a specialized test that stimulates the adrenal gland and measures its function.