

Dog's Addison's Disease Is Treatable

Adrenal disorder in dogs can be successfully managed with several medications.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. My 5-year-old German Wirehaired Pointer mix was just diagnosed with Addison's disease. How rare is it? If it is rare, should I be taking him to a vet who specializes in the disease, or is the treatment pretty standard? He is receiving Percorten-V and prednisone every other day. His last blood test results showed that the Percorten-V was working. His potassium and sodium levels are back in the normal range.

A. Addison's disease is considered uncommon, but not rare. It's probably more prevalent than veterinarians believe because it can be challenging to diagnose. Basically, Addison's occurs when the adrenal gland shuts down, leading to decreased secretions of the hormones it usually produces. Most likely, the shut down of the adrenal gland is caused by an overactive immune system.

The hormones produced by the adrenal gland affect the amount of steroids circulating in the bloodstream, as well as regulate potassium and sodium. Both adrenal gland functions are vital to healthy living. If they get out of regulation, serious disease and even death can result.

It sounds as if your veterinarian is treating your dog's Addison's disease appropriately. It's not necessary to pursue specialty care unless your veterinarian is having difficulty controlling the disease.

The treatment consists of monthly injections to replace the hormone that controls potassium and sodium levels, and oral prednisone (steroids) daily or every other day. Usually, a special or prescription diet is not required.

Many dogs with Addison's disease can live normal, healthy lives, but regular blood tests are important to monitor levels of cortisol, potassium and sodium in order to determine if the vet needs to adjust medication dosages.

If over-treated, your dog could show signs of Cushing's disease, which occurs when steroid levels in the blood are too high. Signs of Cushing's disease may include skin disease, a pot-bellied appearance, and increased food and water intake; let your veterinarian know if you see any of these signs.