

Lethargic Dog Acting Mopey

Dog's high white blood cell count could be a simple infection, or something more serious.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. My 8-year-old, 45-pound, Greyhound-Shepherd mix just had a full panel blood screening done. She seems to be somewhat normal, but I feel she is slowing down. She seems a little mopey. She is eating fine.

I just got the news that her white blood count is terribly high: 18,400. The vet said she will need to take an antibiotic for two weeks, then have her blood rechecked. I am highly concerned and wondering what can cause this and whether it could be a life-and-death disease. The vet says that I can spend thousands of dollars to find out what is wrong, but that isn't in my budget.

A. It's extremely challenging to make any kind of diagnosis via cyberspace, but I can give you some ideas to discuss with your veterinarian.

You describe her as "somewhat normal," but also "a little mopey." Veterinarians enjoy showing off their medical terminology, but in this case we would use the rather unsophisticated abbreviation ADR (ain't doin' right). Perhaps your dog is more lethargic than usual, or does not have the same enthusiasm. Most astute dog owners can tell when something is amiss with their dog.

Your veterinarian is correct in saying that it could be challenging and expensive to investigate the source of any problem. Sometimes, dogs snap out of their funk on their own within a few days without any treatment.

Her white blood cell count is only moderately elevated at 18,400. Sometimes white blood cell counts can go as high as 50,000 or higher. An elevated white blood cell count can be the result of an infection or other source of inflammation. Putting her on antibiotics is a practical and reasonable step to see if she improves. Ideally, it's better to identify the body system involved: Is it the urinary system (did they perform a urinalysis?), the respiratory system, the cardiovascular system, etc. This is determined by correlating any clinical signs or history with the blood abnormalities.

From the sounds of everything, this is not a life-and-death scenario. I would agree that monitoring her for the next few weeks, then rechecking her white cell count (along with a urinalysis and full blood chemistry, if those have not been done) is a good plan. If she appears to be worsening, take her back to the veterinarian sooner.