

# Canine Cushings Disease



adrenal gland tumor. Veterinarians often use the term Cushingoid to describe affected dogs.

Signs are usually first noticed at six or seven years of age, although one or more may have been present for some time. The classic combination of signs in a dog with Cushing's disease includes:

- Excessive water consumption and increased urination, resulting in frequent “accidents” in the house;
- A marked increase in appetite, including behaviors such as begging, stealing food, and getting into the garbage;
- Abdominal enlargement, producing a characteristic “pot-bellied” appearance;
- Lethargy or inactivity;
- Hair loss, which is gradual but dramatic, often progressing until only the head and legs have hair, and thinning of the skin;
- Excessive panting

These signs can make family life so difficult that, sadly, some owners may even begin to consider euthanasia. However, new treatment options are available that can greatly improve your dog's quality of life as well as yours!

**It's important to determine which form of Cushing's disease your dog has because treatment can differ.**

**C**ushing's disease, or hyperadrenocorticism, is a chronic condition that is common in middle aged and senior dogs. It occurs when a dog's pituitary gland or the adrenal glands produce too much cortisol, a steroid hormone or glucocorticoid that the body normally produces as a response to stress.

In the vast majority of cases (about 80%) this imbalance is caused by a small tumor in the pituitary gland (located in the brain) that stimulates secretion of the hormone ACTH, which in turn causes the adrenal glands (located in front of the kidneys) to produce more and more cortisone. This type of Cushing's disease is referred to as **pituitary-dependent hyperadrenocorticism**.

The second type of Cushing's Disease is **adrenal-based hyperadrenocorticism**—this type accounts for about 20% of cases in dogs and is usually the result of an

*Page 1 of 2*

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If Cushing's disease is suspected, your veterinarian will need to run some basic lab tests, including a complete blood count, chemistry profile, and urinalysis, as well as one or more specific tests to confirm the diagnosis and determine whether your dog has the pituitary-dependent or adrenal-related form. These may include the ACTH stimulation test and the low-dose dexamethasone suppression test, which may be used singly or together to confirm the diagnosis. Other tests such as the high-dose dexamethasone suppression test or an abdominal ultrasound can differentiate between the two forms of the disease.

therapy rather than surgery. Surgery is not a practical option for dogs with the pituitary form of the disease.

**If your dog suffers from any of the characteristic signs listed above, talk to your veterinarian. Thanks to recent advances in medical therapy, the outlook for dogs with Cushing's disease is better than ever!**

**Your dog's overall health is a factor in the choice of treatment.**

Therapy for Cushing's disease can be complicated because it usually strikes dogs that may already have one or more concurrent health problems. In most cases, medical treatment is aimed at relief of symptoms, rather than cure, with the goal of making your dog (and you) more comfortable. Effective medications are available. Ask your veterinarian about the best choice of therapy for your dog because potential serious side effects, regular monitoring, and cost are important considerations.

Surgery to remove the tumor and the affected adrenal gland is an option for dogs with adrenal-based Cushing's disease, and if the tumor is benign, prognosis for a complete cure is good. However, the surgery (adrenalectomy) is risky. Furthermore, these adrenal tumors are found to be malignant in about 50% of cases and may have already metastasized (spread) to other organs. Given these risks, most owners choose medical

