

CUSHING'S DISEASE
(HYPERADRENALISM)

GENERAL INFORMATION

Cushing's disease is a disorder of the adrenal glands in which excessive adrenal hormones are produced. The cause of hyperadrenalism may be abnormal pituitary gland function, tumors of the adrenal gland, "cortisone" therapy or unexplained overactivity of the adrenal gland.

Hyperadrenalism is a slowly progressing disease, and the early signs are often not noticed. These include increased appetite, increased drinking and urination, reduced activity and enlargement of the abdomen. As the disease progresses, these signs intensify, and the pet may become fat, pant heavily and lose hair evenly over each side of the body. In some cases, hair loss may be the only apparent change.

Extensive laboratory tests and radiographs (x-rays) or ultrasound may be needed to diagnose the condition, find its cause, and plan treatment.

Of the two main forms of Cushing's Disease, overstimulation of the adrenal gland is most common, comprising about 85% of all causes. This form is called Pituitary Dependent because the pituitary gland is causing the overstimulation of adrenals. The other main form, comprising only about 15% of cases, is the result of a tumor in the adrenal gland itself.

Normally, the diagnosis and monitoring of Cushing's Disease involves multiple steps. Once an actual diagnosis is made via laboratory testing, the next step is to determine which form your dog has, i.e., is it pituitary dependent or is it an adrenal tumor, as treatment differs with each form.

Medical treatment and monitoring is usually effective in controlling pituitary dependent Cushing's disease (the more common type). Surgery is used to treat or control the tumorous form.