



Always consult with a veterinarian that you feel comfortable with before diagnosing or treating any disease on your own. This information is for reference only.

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Coonhound Paralysis

Issue Description

Coonhound paralysis is an acute neurologic disorder in dogs affecting the nerves controlling the muscles of the fore and hind limbs, the muscles of the neck, and the muscles that control breathing and barking.

Other Names

Idiopathic Polyradiculoneuritis

Causes

Coonhound paralysis is suspected to be associated with an overstimulation of a dog's immune system, which may be secondary to contact with a raccoon (and especially raccoon saliva) or another stimulating agent such as a vaccination, a viral respiratory infection, or a viral or bacterial gastrointestinal infection.

Symptoms

Signs will begin 7 to 14 days after contact with a raccoon or other stimulating agent. Initially, affected dogs have a stiff-stilted gait in all limbs that rapidly progresses to various degrees of limb and body weakness, or even paralysis. Voice loss or voice change is also a common early sign. Occasionally, dogs develop weakness of the facial muscles. This will consist of drooping lips, sagging eyes, and an expressionless face. Breathing difficulties may develop in severely affected dogs and, on occasion, this can lead to a complete inability to breathe. Signs progress for 4 to 5 days (occasionally up to 10 days) before the disease stabilizes. However, most dogs will not show immediate improvement in strength at this time. Muscle weakness or paralysis will continue for several weeks and perhaps for up to 4 months. During this time, affected dogs will lose considerable weight due to general muscle wasting. Despite severe signs of weakness (or even paralysis), most dogs remain in good spirits and continue to be responsive to their guardians, even being able to wag their tail. Affected dogs will also be able to eat and drink normally if given the opportunity and will be able to urinate and defecate. However, some dogs may be unwilling to perform these tasks in the first few days of the disease.

Diagnosis

Coonhound paralysis has classic clinical and neurologic signs that are often recognized by your veterinarian after a neurologic examination is performed. No routine blood tests are available to confirm this disease. Your veterinarian may recommend more sophisticated tests to confirm a diagnosis of coonhound paralysis that can only be performed by a neurology specialist. These include electrical testing of your dog's nerves and muscles, muscle and nerve biopsy, and a spinal tap.

Treatment

Unfortunately, no specific drugs are available to treat coonhound paralysis. High doses of immunoglobulins may shorten the disease course, although they have yet to be proven in dogs and are expensive. Excellent nursing care and physiotherapy are the best treatment. Dogs need frequent turning and a thick, padded bed upon which to lie. The bedding must be constantly kept clean of urine and feces. This will help prevent pressure sores and urine scald. Physiotherapy in the form of passive limb movements and swimming (when your dog becomes a little stronger) are essential to help stimulate muscle strength and movement as well as to limit the degree of muscle wasting.

Prognosis

The prognosis is good to excellent, with most dogs going on to full recovery. Severely affected dogs may have mild, permanent neurologic deficits. The most important thing for the guardian of a dog with coonhound paralysis to

remember is that the dog may take up to several months to recover from coonhound paralysis. Unfortunately, dogs do not build up resistance to recurrence of this disease if reexposed to the same offending agent.

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