



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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White Dog Shaker Syndrome

Issue Description

Causes full body tremors in small, white dog breeds. It is most common in West Highland White Terriers, Maltese, Bichons, and Poodles. There is a sudden onset of the disease at one to two years of age. It is worse at times of stress. Nystagmus, difficulty walking, and seizures may occur in some dogs.

Other Names

Idiopathic Cerebellitis, Shaker Dog Syndrome, Little White Shakers Syndrome, WSS

Causes

The cause is unknown, but it may be mediated by the immune system.

Symptoms

WSS is characterized by a sudden onset of constant tremors all over the body, including the head and eyeballs. Chaotic random eye movement is called opsoclonus. Rapid, involuntary, rhythmic eye movements, often indicative of central nervous system dysfunction is called nystagmus. The tremors are exaggerated by handling, forced locomotion, excitement and high levels of stress. It decreases but may not completely disappear with total relaxation. Putting the dog in a crate in a minimally darkened room, where there is quiet, has helped reduce the tremors during times of stress. The dogs are alert and responsive and have no deficiency in cranial nerve function. The tremors may be severe enough to cause an ataxic gait, but strength remains normal. On occasion, one of these dogs convulses. At the onset of the syndrome, and usually for a short period of time, the animal may refuse to eat. Therefore, great care and TLC must be given to encourage eating and drinking, or, this must be done by hand. Eventually, they return to eating and drinking on their own. Some dogs benefit by elevating their food and water bowls off the ground, so the dog does not have to lower its head as much.

Diagnosis

Your veterinarian will diagnose this condition based on the clinical signs and the fact that tests for other possible causes of these signs show no abnormalities. For the veterinarian: Intention tremors may be mild to severe, affecting all 4 limbs and the head. There is mild to moderate hypermetria and occasionally a head tilt. Conscious proprioception, spinal and higher reflexes, cranial nerves, personality and voluntary motor functions are unaffected. Para- or tetraparesis may occur.

This disease is most often associated with a mild central nervous system inflammation. This inflammation commonly affects the cerebellum, and dysfunction of this part of the brain may be one of the initiators of the tremor. Brain inflammation is determined diagnostically by looking at a sample of cerebrospinal fluid under the microscope. In an affected dog, this fluid contains increased numbers of, white blood cells with normal to mildly elevated protein concentrations.

Treatment

Treatment with corticosteroids may put the dog into remission, or diazepam may control the symptoms. Typically the two drugs are used together. There is a good prognosis, and symptoms usually resolve with treatment within a week, although lifelong treatment may be necessary.

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