

CUSHING'S SYNDROME

WHAT IS CUSHING'S SYNDROME?

Cushing's syndrome (or hyperadrenocorticism, or hyperglucocorticism) is a disease caused by an increase of cortisone in the body.

THE CAUSES

In most cases, Cushing's syndrome is caused by the excessive and prolonged administration of cortisone drugs (iatrogenic Cushing's). However, it can also be the consequence of exaggerated cortisone production by the adrenal glands (spontaneous Cushing's). In this case, the excessive cortisone production may be caused by a tumor of the adrenal gland, or by a tumor of the pituitary gland, another gland based in the brain, which regulates adrenal cortisone production.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Whatever the cause of Cushing's syndrome, the clinical symptoms are always the same. Increased thirst and hunger of the animal, breathlessness, reluctance to exercise are commonly observed together with hyperglycemia (with the possibility of developing secondary diabetes), and a characteristic swelling of the abdomen called "barrel-like." Animals with Cushing's syndrome are also predisposed to frequently contract urinary and skin infections that require repeated courses of antibiotics. Left untreated, Cushing's syndrome is a disease that slowly leads to the death of the animal.

DIAGNOSIS.

To diagnose the disease, and assess the presence and site of the neoplasia, specific blood tests, urine tests and ultrasound are used. Unfortunately, none of them is 100% reliable, so only the combination of more than one of these tests allows an accurate diagnosis to be made. In particular, a screening test is always performed before a specific test. It is very important to confirm the diagnosis before setting any treatment.

THERAPY

Iatrogenic Cushing's is generally not treated, and it resolves on its own, even after months, with a discontinuation of cortisone therapy.

Spontaneous Cushing's, on the other hand, should be treated with drugs or with the surgical removal of the adrenal neoplasia. This surgery is generally successful if the adrenal tumor is benign, while the prognosis is poor if the tumor is malignant.

If, on the other hand, Cushing's syndrome depends on a pituitary tumor, the treatment of choice is pharmacological and is aimed at inhibiting the production of cortisone by the adrenal gland. This treatment should be prolonged throughout the animal's life, and the patient should be monitored regularly by the veterinarian, to determine exactly the dosage of medication needed to keep the hormonal balance.