

VETERINARIAN'S GUIDE TO THE MEDICAL CARE OF THE RETIRED GREYHOUND

With the increasing number of Retired Greyhounds being placed in homes, it is important to be knowledgeable in the unique medical conditions that can and do occur in this breed.

Some of these conditions are unique to the racing Greyhound, but most are diseases present due to poor husbandry and lack of general medical care.

Diseases not commonly found in animals in this area are extremely common in these dogs, who have been infested with fleas and disease-carrying ticks. The poor diets that they have been fed, 4-D meat (Dead, Diseased, Dying, Decaying) lead to intestinal diseases that can be very challenging to treat, and that pose a risk to other animals and humans as well.

It is important to be aware of the special needs of these beautiful creatures that need our help after being neglected and abused. Increasing your medical knowledge of the Greyhound's unique conditions will help avoid potentially life-threatening error in diagnosis and treatment.

ALOPECIA The "Bald Butt" syndrome seen in many Retired Greyhounds, is in most cases due to "cage rub." Hypothyroidism is often blamed as the cause, however, this is seldom true. Many dogs regain their haircoat with time, others do not.

ANEMIA The normal hematocrit of a healthy Greyhound is significantly higher than other canines. A PCV of 55-60% is considered normal; a PCV of 45% may indicate anemia. Greyhounds often normally have a moderately low WBC. A WBC of 5,000 - 6,000 may be a consistent finding, sometimes even lower levels are found in dogs with Babesia or Ehrlichia.

BABISIOSIS This is a relatively common disease found in Retired Greyhounds. A blood parasite, transmitted by the bite of a tick, a positive titer is found in approximately 75-80% of retired racers. Even dogs brought in from more Northern states are at risk due to the constant travel and shipping from track to track, with most tracks located in Southern states. A low titer, indicates exposure to the disease, whereas a high to moderately high titer may indicate active disease (even without clinical signs). Treatment consists of one or two treatments with Imizol (Imidocarb), based on the recheck titer. Failure to treat, even while asymptomatic, may result in a hemolytic crisis.

BLOAT Amazingly enough, bloat is not that common in the Greyhound. However, due to their deep-chested conformation, bloat and Gastric Dilatation - Volvulus can occur.

BROKEN TOES Many Greyhounds come off the track with broken toes or amputated toes. These are often old injuries that are beyond repair.

CAMPYLOBACTER JEJUNI Due to the poor diet fed these dogs at the track, *Campylobacter jejuni* is an extremely common parasite found in the stool. They are often fed raw, diseased meat, which may be the origin of this parasite. Certain antibiotics are more effective at eliminating this parasite; constant sanitization is essential to prevent spread.

CHRONIC INFECTIONS Due to the lack of adequate medical care in many instances, dogs may suffer from chronic untreated infections. Otitis, Cystitis, Prostatitis, and Conjunctivitis are examples of common infections.

CLITORAL HYPERTROPHY Many female dogs suffer from clitoral hypertrophy due to the steroid injections received on the track. This may become less prominent over time. This may lead to vaginal infections, or show no obvious signs of problems. Surgical resection is **not** usually recommended.

CORNEAL DISEASE A relatively uncommon immune-mediated corneal disease is found in some Greyhounds. This condition can result in total corneal opacity

and blindness without proper, aggressive treatment.

CUTANEOUS HEMANGIOMA Poorly haired dogs may develop small blood-blister like lesions on various areas of the body. Most often appearing on the belly and thighs, these small raised lesions are exacerbated or even due to sunlight. This is the benign precursor to a cancerous condition, so it is recommended that dogs that develop this condition be protected from sunlight with skin block and protective clothing.

DERMATOLOGIC DISEASES Due to the poor sanitary conditions they are kept in, many Retired Racers suffer from Pyoderma or Allergic Skin Diseases. Comedones are common on the ventrum (Biore' patches may be helpful). Seborrhea is also common, and is often responsive to diet alone. Other products may be helpful for topical (Resisoothe, EFA Bath Oil) or parenteral (DermCaps, EFA Caps, 3V Caps) assistance.

DIETARY INTOLERANCE Many Greyhounds show extreme sensitivity to dietary changes, and many suffer from constant diarrhea if not fed the appropriate food. Most thrive on premium lamb and rice diets. If chronic diarrhea in the absence of parasites persists, a change in diet may be warranted.

EHRlichiosis A blood parasite transmitted by the bite of a tick, *Ehrlichia canis* is the most common form to infect dogs. This disease tends to have a chronic relapsing nature. Many dogs have an elevated titer without showing symptoms; others may have multiple symptoms. Low titers indicate exposure, however, any elevation should be treated. Imizol is often very helpful in treatment, antibiotics don't often control the disease or the symptoms. A hemolytic crisis is a real possibility with this disease.

FRACTURES Fractures may occur on the track, which often result in the euthanasia or retirement of the racing dog. However, fractures can occur in the retired racer. The Greyhounds bones are slim, and hence are more susceptible to fractures, even when they're only racing around their back yard. Some of the more common racing fractures are those of the calcaneous/talus and tarsal bones. Fractures of the metatarsals and metacarpals are common in the pet Greyhound.

GIARDIA Another extremely common parasite in Retired Greyhounds. Approximately 75% may carry *Giardia* upon adoption. *Giardia* often causes diarrhea in people too.

HEARTWORM DISEASE Due to their often lack of preventive medication, Greyhounds are often exposed to heartworm disease.

HYPOTHYROIDISM There is significant controversy about whether Hypothyroidism occurs in Greyhounds or whether they normally run low T4

levels. Both seem to be true. Studies have been done which show that Greyhounds may have normally low T4 levels without having Hypothyroidism, however, others do truly suffer from Hypothyroidism. A Thyroid Panel (M.S.U.) will help determine which is actually true.

IDIOPATHIC CUTANEOUS AND RENAL GLOMERULAR VASCULOPATHY

This is a disease unique to the Greyhound breed, which may manifest itself as an ulcerative dermatosis, which can also progress to a serious renal disease leading to severe renal compromise and often death. Treatment can be successful, however the disease can be rapidly fatal.

IMMUNE-MEDIATED DISEASES A somewhat conspicuous increased frequency of immune-mediated diseases has been seen in these dogs.

LACERATIONS Greyhounds have very thin skin and are extremely susceptible to lacerations. Many simple lacerations result in degloving due to the thin skin and virtually non-existent subcutaneous layer.

LYMES DISEASE Another tick-borne parasite, Lymes is more likely found in Retired Racers from the Eastern states. Chronic arthritis and renal disease may be sequelae of this disease.

MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS Probably the most common problems seen in racing dogs and often even in backyard racers, are musculoskeletal injuries. Strains, sprains, ruptured muscles, and avulsions and tears of tendons and ligaments are frequently found. Some of the more common injuries are those of the superficial and deep digital flexor tendons leading to a "dropped toe" or the gracilis muscle, known as a "dropped back muscle."

PARASITES Most Greyhounds on the track suffer from chronic parasitism. Fleas, ticks and every possible intestinal parasite are common occurrences. *Giardia* and *Campylobacter* are frequently seen.

PERIODONTAL DISEASE Due to the poor diet and the constant muzzling, many Greyhounds suffer from dental decay, worn and broken teeth, abscesses and gingival recession. Owners should be instructed that constant dental care may be necessary. Multiple antibiotics, metronidazole, and Stomadex patches are often of assistance in controlling the disease.

REGURGITATION Usually not a pathologic condition, many dogs eat their food so fast that they regurgitate it immediately. This problem can often be alleviated by elevating their food or using a larger bowl with a thin layer of kibble, so that they do not gobble their food.

REVERSE SNEEZING Often due to eating too fast or minor throat irritation, reverse sneezing often sounds like gasping for breath. Occasionally a parasite

called *Paragonimus* can be the cause of chronic, frequent reverse sneezing. This parasite is also known as a lungworm, and lives in the air passages leading to the lungs, thus causing irritation and coughing or reverse sneezing. This parasite rarely shows up on routine stool exams, so treatment is often recommended if any symptoms are present.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN SPOTTED FEVER A tick-borne parasite, *Rickettsia rickettsii*, that can produce serious disease in humans and animals, this disease is more commonly found in dogs from the Western states and also near the Appalachians.

SEPARATION ANXIETY This is a condition seen quite frequently in the Retired Greyhound. Excessive vocalization, destructive behavior, and inappropriate elimination are the classic signs often seen. Retired Greyhounds often become extremely attached to their new owners, frequently following them around the house constantly. Clomicalm (Clomipramine) is often very useful, along with behavioral conditioning, in the elimination of these frustrating destructive behaviors.

SESAMOIDITIS Many Retired Racers suffer from chronic or recurrent sesamoiditis. Some show periodic lameness, possibly requiring non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications and rest.

SPLIT WEB This is a term used to describe torn interdigital tissue. This condition can occur on the track and in the backyard. This injury is best treated by debriding and suturing together the two portions. Bandages must be kept on for at least two weeks. If this is not successful, the dog can manage with the tear as long as it heals properly.

TAIL INJURIES Like other large-breed, long-tailed dogs, Greyhounds often sustain injuries to the ends of their tails. Proper bandaging, (syringe cases work great) is usually sufficient to allow healing. Amputation is rarely necessary except in long-standing injuries.

TICK DISEASES Besides *Babesia*, *Ehrlichia*, *Lymes* and *Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever*, there are other more recently discovered diseases transmitted by ticks, which can affect many dogs. *Bartonellosis* and *Hepatazoonosis* are two tick-transmitted diseases which can elude the most extensive diagnostician. These diseases require specialized diagnostic tests only performed in limited facilities. Chronic, persistent disease despite treatment of other tick diseases, and chronic mucoid ocular discharge are two prominent features of these recently discovered conditions.

WEATHER-RELATED DISEASE Hyperthermia and Hypothermia are both very common diseases in the Greyhound due to their minimal level of insulation. Owners should be cautioned that this breed is more susceptible than most others

to these conditions.

Other Important Information

ANESTHESIA Greyhounds, being sighthounds, are susceptible to severe side effects from certain anesthetics. It is not recommended that barbiturate anesthetics be used, due to the Greyhound's commonly idiosyncratic reaction. Tranquilizers may be used, but the dose should be decreased by about half when used as a pre-anesthetic. Ketamine/Valium, as well as Propofol as induction agents are recommended, as is Isoflurane or Propofol for maintenance. **Malignant Hyperthermia** has been seen in Greyhounds, thus dogs should be carefully monitored during any anesthetic procedures. Local anesthetics are often helpful in the repair of minor lacerations, as most Greyhounds will cooperate.

FLEA PREVENTIVES AND INSECTICIDES Be aware that Greyhounds are very susceptible to toxicities due to insecticides. Organophosphates are often lethal to the Greyhound. Compounds with pyrethrins or flea pheromones are preferred. Examples of **safe** products are: Adams products, VetKem products, Mycodex products, Frontline, Program, Sentinel, and Advantage. Examples of **unsafe** products are: Zodiac products, Blockade, Raid, Flea collars, Proban, Breakthru and Biospot (the latter two have too high a level of pyrethrin).

This is just a overview of some of the more commonly seen conditions in the Greyhound breed.

If you have further questions about any of these diseases or others that affect the Greyhound and other sporting breeds, please refer to the following reference materials:

Care of the Racing Greyhound. Blythe, Gannon and Craig. Veterinary Practice Publishing Company, 1994. (805) 965-1028

Canine Sports Medicine and Surgery. Bloomberg, Dee and Taylor. W.B. Saunders, 1998.

I also welcome any questions and would be glad to share my experience with you, and/or direct you to specialists around the country who may be of assistance to you.

Thank You for your interest and concern for this noble breed!

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