

Owner Information Sheet – *Idiopathic peripheral vestibular disease*

Background

The vestibular system is the major component of the nervous system responsible for the coordination of eye movements and the maintenance of posture and balance. It can be functionally divided into the *peripheral vestibular system*, comprising the inner ear and vestibular nerve, and the *central vestibular system*, which is located within the brain.

Cause and diagnosis

The cause for idiopathic peripheral vestibular disease is currently unknown, but it is likely to represent a transient problem involving the inner ear or the vestibular nerve running between the inner ear and brain. It is therefore a diagnosis of exclusion that is obtained by ruling out other diseases that might present with the same or similar clinical signs. It is particularly important to distinguish peripheral vestibular disease from conditions affecting the brain (central vestibular disease) as the treatment options and outcome may be very different.

In addition to idiopathic peripheral vestibular disease, other causes of peripheral vestibular dysfunction include hypothyroidism (low thyroid hormone levels), middle ear disease, toxic causes or growths. Causes of central vestibular disease include brain tumours, inflammation/infection, toxic causes and vascular events (stroke). These causes can be excluded by performing blood tests, advanced imaging of the head (CT or MRI) and cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) analysis.

Clinical signs (symptoms)

The clinical signs of idiopathic peripheral vestibular disease usually present rapidly (acute onset) and include incoordination when walking ('drunken' gait), a head tilt, wide-based stance and nystagmus (spontaneous eye flickering). Some animals may also vomit, likely secondary to the dizziness and motion sickness.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for idiopathic peripheral vestibular disease. Treatment consists of supportive medication and care. Supportive medication includes anti-sickness medication and/or sedative medication to keep your pet calm. Supportive care may include keeping your pet in a padded bed, preventing trips and falls, providing easy access to food and water, the use of a harness and sling to help your pet balance whilst being encouraged to walk, and physiotherapy.

Prognosis (outcome)

The prognosis for idiopathic peripheral vestibular disease is usually good. Most animals start to show signs of improvement within the first 3 to 5 days. Complete recovery is usually seen by 2 to 4 weeks after the beginning of the episode.

Despite the good prognosis, relapses of this disease (on the same side or the opposite side) can occur. It is common, in some cases, to have a residual mild head tilt.

If you have any concerns about your dog or their treatment, do not hesitate to contact your veterinarian.

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The Granary, Bunstead Barns, Poles Lane,
Hursley, Winchester, Hampshire, SO21 2LL.

Tel: 01962 767920 Fax: 01962 775909

Email: info@andersonmoores.com

www.andersonmoores.com

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VAT Registration No. 881327808