



CUSHINGS by Wendy Clewly

Tia (Ch Araidh Tea Leaf AD, JDX, SPD) has always been a very active girl loving her time both in the Confirmation and Agility rings it was during February 2013 that we noticed something was amiss at just seven years old and having always been approximately 15kg her weight she had put on a kilo or so but more noticeable was her coat which would have been better suited to a brown grizzly bear than a Stafford.

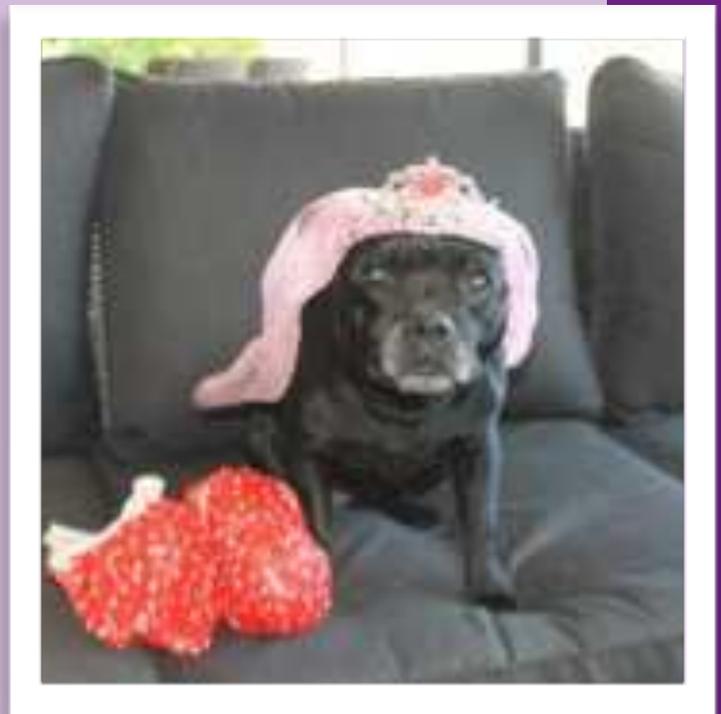
We commenced putting her on a bit of a diet and she was ok so entered her in an Agility trial where both girls Tia and Alice both obtained another Agility title each it was during the presentation as a lady sat stroking her that she noticed her glands were enlarged, upon feeling it panic set in, they were huge, how had I missed it..... off to the vets we went. Couple of tests and it was put down to an ear infection as Tia can't just swim she has to dive and spends a lot of time underwater, those mad Araidhs although I think the first Araidh to like swimming! although mum Carey I seem to remember loved submerging her head hmmm.

Couple of months later and her weight remained high she had gone from a non greedy dog to snatching food and was always hungry so back to the vets we went, a few tests later and Cushings was suspected with hindsight now knowing the symptoms it's blindingly obvious.

There is no single test to diagnose Cushing's disease. The history, physical exam, and results of initial blood and urine tests often provide a strong suspicion for the presence of Cushing's disease.

Laboratory tests that are most commonly altered by Cushing's disease are an increase in white blood cell count, increase in the liver enzyme ALP (also called SAP or serum alkaline phosphatase), increased blood sugar (although not as high as the blood sugar levels of diabetic patients), increased cholesterol and dilute urine.

Our vet in Tamworth, NSW suspected it might be Adrenal Cushings which gives very little lifespan expectancy to be sure they arranged an appointment for us at SASH in Sydney (they are featured on Bondi Vet on TV).





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Sydney for us is a five hour drive and they wanted Tia in overnight so a local hotel was booked for me. I was amazed at SASH it's in a very corporate area and is over several high rise buildings, the place is amazing, the staff are first class and the facilities as good as I've seen anywhere.

Cushing's disease (hyperadrenocorticism) is the overproduction of the hormone cortisol by the adrenal glands that are located in the belly near the kidneys. Most dogs with Cushing's disease are about 6 years old or older. Cortisol affects the function of many organs in the body, so the signs of Cushing's disease may be varied.

Some of the more common signs of Cushing's disease include hair loss, pot-bellied appearance, increased appetite, and increased drinking and urination called polydipsia and polyuria (PU/PD). Hair loss caused by Cushing's disease occurs primarily on the body, sparing the head and legs. Less common signs of Cushing's disease are weakness, panting, and an abnormal way of walking (stiff or standing or walking with the paws knuckled over). Some dogs with Cushing's disease develop a blood clot to the lungs and show a rapid onset of difficulty breathing.

There are two types of Cushing's disease that are treated differently. The most common form of Cushing's disease is caused by the overproduction of a hormone by the pituitary gland in the brain that in turn controls the amount of cortisol produced by the adrenal glands. This is called pituitary-dependent Cushing's. A small percentage of dogs with Cushing's disease have a tumour of one of the adrenal glands which is called adrenal-dependent Cushing's.

Tia has Pituitary Cushings so for her this means a life-long daily medication of Vetoryl the key is to get the quantity correct and this involves testing monthly and adjusting medication each time to bring the cortisol count to normal.

We had been going great until about three months in one evening Tia started panting and acting like she was high on drugs, anyone that know here will know she is a sweetheart, never naughty and can be taken into any situation and relied on to be a great ambassador for the breed - what we now had was a girl screaming and panting a four hour out of hours vet visit later and home she came for the night and was booked in the next day where she then stayed for a few days.

Nine months on all the symptoms have slow dissipated, she had gone from 15kg to 20kg but literally in the last few weeks she is now 16.5kg and has lost the typical Cushings pot bellied appearance and finally we have a tuck up! literally the only remaining symptom is her coat which still reminds me of a grizzly bear but all that aside we finally have our girl back to 'normal' of course the pituitary tumour is still there but the symptoms at least are now under control thanks to the medication.



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Footnote:

Tia lost her battle with Cushings on the 4th July 2015

After the medications were under control her weight returned to 15kg and her energy returned tenfold she again had her busy head on loving nothing better than to run/play 24/7 her boundless energy and love of swimming, balls and shoes was her very essence.

In the last few weeks we found that she would not eat I had read that anorexia can be a final stage of Cushings but we pushed on changing her food almost daily until eventually her bowl resembled a clock face with a little spoonful of chopped steak, mince beef with cheese, tuna, cheese on toast, chicken breast you name it we tried to tempt her to eat towards the end she was not eating at all and her weight dropped to under 14kg. One afternoon I knew that it was time. Our vet came out and she passed on

