

Dog & small animals vet



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High Blood Pressure in Dogs

Most of us are well aware of the problem of high blood pressure (hypertension) in people. It is one of the major health problems affecting us and increases the risk of heart disease, stroke and kidney disease. Most sufferers don't know they have it until they have been tested.

We now know that hypertension can also affect our pets. There are some features of hypertension that are very similar to the condition in people, but also some striking differences. It is only fairly recently that veterinarians have been routinely checking their patient's blood pressure in practice. Obviously the size of our patients means that specialised equipment is needed to accurately measure their blood pressure.

Essential hypertension accounts for about 95% of cases of hypertension in people. This is hypertension where there is no identifiable underlying cause. This type of hypertension is actually uncommon in cats and dogs. In most cases of hypertension in our patients there is an underlying cause responsible.

The most common causes of hypertension in dogs are kidney disease as well as some hormonal diseases, including diabetes and Cushing's disease (a disease where there is excess circulating cortisol in the body). The phenomenon known as "white coat" hypertension also occurs in our patients.

White coat hypertension occurs where a patient's blood pressure is elevated in the Dr's rooms, but is normal when checked by the patient at home. The fact that this stress -

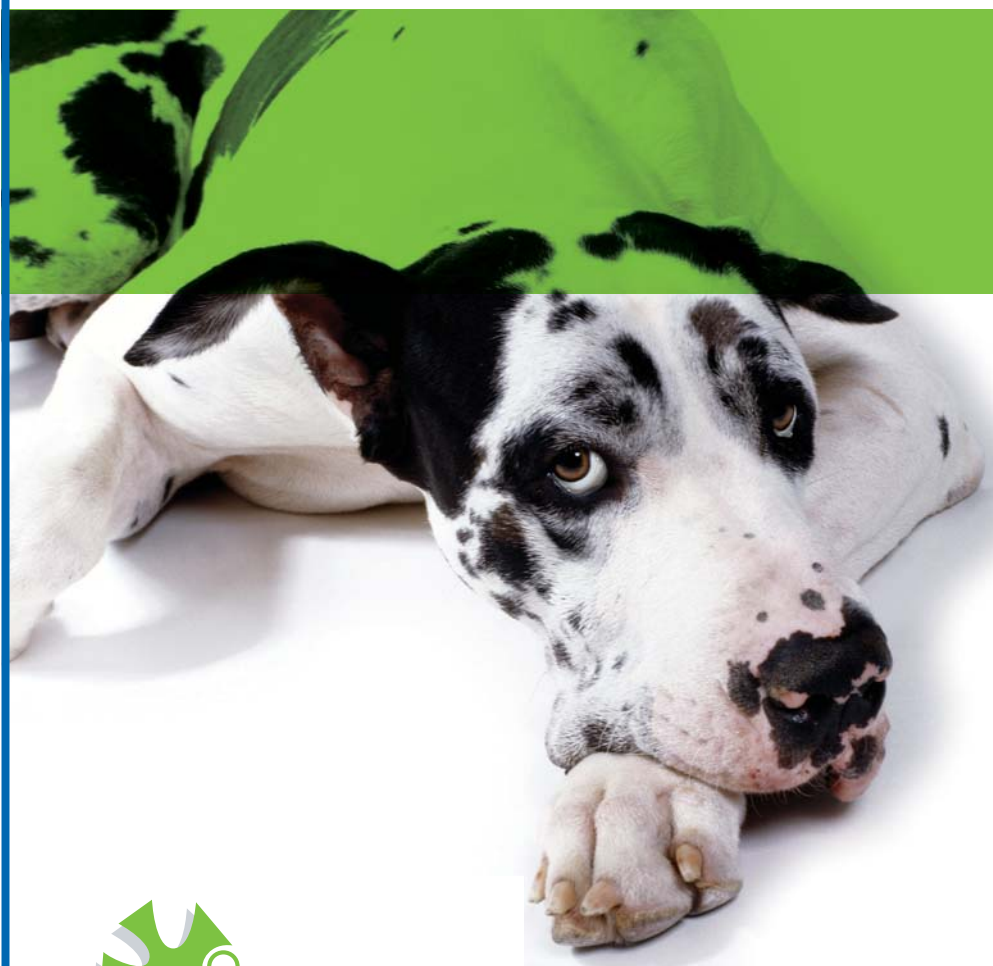
related phenomenon also occurs in our patient's means we have to be careful not to over diagnose hypertension. In my practice we have the owner with their pet in a nice quiet room. We usually like for them to be in the room with the owner soothing them for at least 30 minutes before we start taking blood pressure measurements.

The role of dietary factors and in particular salt intake in people with hypertension has been acknowledged for many years. The role that they play in cats and dogs is less clear. Many cats and dogs on commercial pet food diets are consuming up to 10 times their normal daily salt requirement (as are many people).

Hypertension is more common in older cats and dogs. The question is, are these cases of hypertension in older pets the result of years of excessive salt intake or is there another cause (such as kidney disease). On the weight of the current evidence it seems that salt intake does not play a major role in causing hypertension in our pets. However if your pet has been diagnosed as having hypertension it is advisable to restrict the salt intake.

So how will you know if your pet has hypertension? Well as is the case in people, hypertension usually causes no signs initially. It may be present for many months or years before signs become apparent. Unfortunately by the time these signs appear irreversible organ damage may already have occurred. Hypertension may be diagnosed when these signs appear, or alternatively it may be diagnosed while your pet is still asymptomatic if blood pressure testing is performed.

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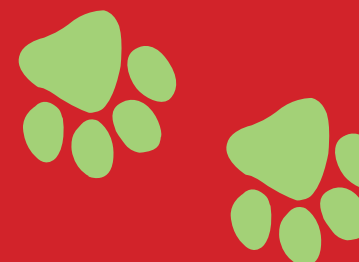
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