

Maggie's Diagnosis of Addison's Disease



Maggie is my now almost 12 year old Beardie. She was my first Beardie and what an introduction to the breed she was for me. Such a sweet girl, but also one that seemed to have endless energy. I knew from the start that she was going to need a job. We started agility before her first birthday and we also had fun taking herding lessons. Maggie was always ready to go. She was never a great eater, but would never turn down a treat.

Then the week before labor day in 2005 everything changed. Over the weekend Maggie ran an agility trial and did great. By Tuesday she wasn't eating well, but since she never was a good eater I didn't really think too much of it; but on Thursday when she still had not eaten much I decided to take her in to the vet. She of course was excited to be there - full of energy. He didn't think much of her not eating since she was acting fine. Her WBC was a bit high so he gave me some antibiotics and sent me home. By Saturday she was still not eating and started to become lethargic. He did more blood work and I asked if maybe she had Addison's Disease as I knew Beardies can be prone to Addison's. He told me her blood work did not indicate Addison's, gave her some fluids and again sent me on my way with a new antibiotic. That was the Saturday before Labor Day.

By Monday (Labor Day) Maggie was so lethargic she did not even want to go outside. I couldn't get her to take treats and she was vomiting up bile. I knew there was something wrong so off to the emergency vet we went. Maggie was able to walk in on her own and did greet the vet with kisses, but not the exuberant jumps with which she

normally greets new friends. They did blood work and it now showed her electrolytes were way out of whack her Na/K ratio was 20. He wanted me to leave Maggie there for fluids and so they could run the ACTH stim test to confirm the diagnosis. It was hard to leave her there, but I knew that she needed more care than I could give her so I left her in their capable hands. On Tuesday the ACTH stim test confirmed a diagnosis of primary Addison's. They started her on the Percorten injection and prednisone. Maggie was well enough to come home that night. She was still pretty weak and had lost a lot of weight and muscle tone, but she had that spark back in her eye.

The hard part was over, I had the diagnosis. Some call Addison's the great pretender as it can be mistaken for so many other things. Looking back now I wish I had insisted my vet run the ACTH stim test as Maggie's Na/K ratio was just starting to be in the abnormal range when she was there on Saturday. I learned I should have trusted my gut and been more of an advocate for Maggie. **That is something I have learned throughout this whole process, we have to speak for our pets as they can't do it themselves.** Once her diagnosis was made I had to be the one to insist on the electrolyte tests to adjust her Percorten dose. A lot of vets want to dose base on weight per the manufacturer's recommendation, but most Beardies actually need far less Percorten than this. (*Ed. This is true for most breeds.*) So after a few months of tests we found out Maggie's ideal dose - she gets 1 ml every 35 days. She was originally on 1.5 ml every 28 days. We also were able to reduce her prednisone dose to 1 mg daily. Maggie does not handle pred well but she does great on the low daily dose.

After getting her meds adjusted to the right level we worked on Maggie gaining the weight back and getting her muscle tone back. We did exercises daily for this and within 3-4 months she was back to running agility and herding. She always got a bit more pred for these activities as even though she loved them it was a form of good stress. **One thing having an Addisonian dog does for you is to make you very in tune with their moods.** You learn what their stressors are, whether they are good or bad. For Maggie I was lucky as not much bothered her, so no real bad stresses. **Diagnosing Addison's is the hardest part.** Once the meds are all figured out affected dogs live pretty much normal lives. Maggie has been living with Addison's for 8 years now without one hiccup. She lived a very full life of agility and herding for many years after her diagnosis. She is still going strong at almost 12. I had her at a trial a few weekends ago and multiple people came up to me and wanted to meet my new puppy. She still loves every person and dog she meets. I am so thankful for all the people who encouraged me when Maggie was first diagnosed. I did not know what the future held for Maggie, but through the encouragement of others I soon learned how to manage this disease and that Maggie was going to be okay.



Jennifer Scheytt
Estrella Bearded Collies
<http://www.estrellaBeardies.com/>

Footnote from OHR: Addison's disease was reported in 81 (3.7%) with average age of onset of 4.5 years. 21% also had hypothyroidism. Addison's was the cause of death in 21 dogs.