

Dear Dr. Wise,

Question: Our veterinarian has just informed us that Max, our six-year-old Scottish terrier, has Cushing's disease and needs more tests. It all sounds complicated and confusing. Is there a successful treatment for the disease? Is it going to kill Max?

Answer: Canine Cushing's Syndrome (CCS) is a somewhat rare condition in which the adrenal glands are over productive. The problem also exists in human medicine. The disease is serious and complex but responds well to treatment in most cases.

An adrenal gland is located beside each kidney and, with CCS, produces too much of the hormone cortisol. A tumor of the adrenal gland or a problem in the pituitary gland triggers the condition.

Max probably was showing some or all of the following signs: excessive drinking and urinating, increased appetite, potbellied appearance (due to increased fat in the abdomen), muscle weakness and lethargy, and hair loss (sometimes over the entire body).

Many of these same signs are common to other problems. The extensive testing help us make an accurate diagnosis. Increased thirst and urination, for example, can signal diabetes, kidney disease and liver disease as well as CCS.

Cushing's can be caused by a problem in the adrenal or pituitary glands. Most commonly, the cause is a tumor in the pituitary gland, which results in excess production of cortisol in the adrenal gland. The pituitary gland, located in the brain, normally tells the adrenal glands what to do, but with CCS, it constantly tells them to release too much hormone.

Cushing's is a serious disease, but I hope the test results open the way for successful treatment.

If you have any question about you pet, write to Dr. Wise, Indiana Veterinary Medical Association, 201 S. Capitol Ave, Suite # 405, Indianapolis, Indiana, 46225, or [www.invma.org](http://www.invma.org)