

IMHA

Your pet has been diagnosed with IMHA (immune mediated hemolytic anemia). This is a disease where the body's own immune system becomes overactive and begins attacking and destroying its own red blood cells as if they were foreign material. This is a serious condition and your pet will require close monitoring and treatment in order to achieve the best results.

Cause:

There are many potential causes for IMHA, including infections, tick fever, bug bites, cancer or even an inappropriate reaction to a routine vaccine. However, the most common cause by far is "idiopathic", or unknown.

Treatments:

There are several key points for treating IMHA. Over time some of the medications or dosages may be changed according to how your pet responds, but in general all IMHA patients will require the following:

- 1) Blood transfusions. During the initial episode, your patient will have a very low amount of red blood cells, which will not provide enough oxygen to their body. Blood transfusions are a way to quickly increase the amount of red blood cells while the other treatments have time to take effect and start toning down your pet's overactive immune system.
- 2) HBOT - Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy may assist in speeding up the healing process by introducing higher concentrations of oxygen into the bloodstream, which stimulates the blood cells.
- 3) Prednisone/Prednisolone – This medication is a steroid. It is being prescribed at a high dose in order to suppress the immune system. This is the most important part of treating an immune mediated disease, such as IMHA, so it is very important that you give this medication as prescribed on the bottle until otherwise directed by a veterinarian. <animal> will likely be on this medication for at least 4-8 months. The most common side effects of steroids include increased thirst, increased urination, increased appetite, and weight gain. If your patient is currently taking a Non-Steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drug (NSAID) for any other condition it is important that the NSAID be discontinued. Using Steroids and NSAIDs at the same time can cause fatal gastrointestinal ulceration. Common NSAIDs in veterinary medicine include, but are not limited to, Rimadyl (Carprofen), Meloxicam, and Previcox (firocoxib). If you have any questions regarding drugs that are safe to give while your pet is on steroids, please call us. NEXT DOSE:
- 4) Clopidogrel (Plavix) – This medication is to prevent <animal> from forming abnormal clots. As mentioned earlier, the most common cause of death for IMHA patients after inadequate red blood cells is abnormal clot formation. <animal> will be on this medication until we are able to wean the steroid dose. Start IMMEDIATELY
- 5) Cyclosporine (Atopica) – This medication is an immune modulator, meaning that it is used to help decrease abnormal immune responses in diseases like IMHA. <animal> will need to continue this medication until directed by a veterinarian to decrease the dosage. NEXT DOSE:
- 6) Famotidine – This medication is an antacid. Long-term steroid use at high dosages has the potential to cause GI ulceration. This medication is being prescribed to reduce acid and minimize the chance of ulceration happening. It is recommended to continue <animal> on this drug for as long as they are on prednisolone.
- 7) Cerenia (maropitant) – This medication is used to prevent nausea. Some of the medications <animal> has been prescribed to control their IMHA have the potential to cause nausea. This medication can be used as needed when <animal> becomes nauseous.
- 8) Mycophenolate - This medication is used as a rapid immunosuppressant therapy to reduce the destruction of antibodies.
- 9) Azathioprine - This medication is a purine antagonist that is useful in immunosuppression for chronic maintenance. This drug is not recommended for use in cats.



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Monitoring:

We recommend rechecking a complete blood count (this includes red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets) tomorrow. Either a CBC or a Packed-cell volume (red blood cells only) will be repeated every two days until <animal> values are acceptable. After the initial episode we will continue to check either a CBC or a PCV weekly, and eventually less frequently as <animal> begins to respond to treatment. We are often able to slowly taper a patient diagnosed with IMHA off of all medications over a 3 to 8-month period.

It is possible that <animal> will need another transfusion in the future. If this happens it is very important that you tell the veterinarian that <animal> has had a blood transfusion in the past. It is very important to make sure the veterinarian knows <animal> blood type and performs a cross-match on the donated blood prior to any future transfusions in order to minimize the chance of life-threatening reactions

Having a patient diagnosed with IMHA can be scary and overwhelming. We are here to support both you and your pet through this difficult time and are available to answer any questions you may have at 480-945-8484. Please call us with any concerns you might have.