



Hyperacute Exertional Rhabdomyolysis ('HER')

a debilitating and potentially life-threatening muscle disorder, which can follow prolonged, or unusual exertion. It can affect dogs of any age, breed, or gender. It is very important to be able to recognise the signs of 'HER'

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Physical effects may vary, but 'HER' and heatstroke can show similar signs - treatment is basically the same

- Heavy panting (sometimes with thick, ropey saliva)
- Red flushed ears and nose
- Muscle tremors, shaking
- Weakness, difficulty walking, dragging hind legs, staggering
- Hunched back, stilted gait, especially in hind legs
- Generalized muscle pain (indicated by sensitivity to touch)
- Cardiac arrhythmia
- Difficulty changing position from standing to lying or vice versa
- In serious cases - collapse, loss of consciousness, or seizures

If your dog shows any of these signs

URGENT ACTION IS VITAL

STOP EXERCISE IMMEDIATELY – MOVE AWAY FROM SOURCE OF EXCITEMENT – INTO A COOL PLACE

WHAT TO DO

**** BRING DOWN BODY TEMPERATURE ****

Rapid active cooling - accomplished by:-

- hosing the dog down, or spraying with cool water – begin with feet and work up
- applying cool, wet towels to the body, especially underside, ears, feet & between back legs
- **IMPORTANT** – refresh towels frequently so they stay cool – as covering the dog can add heat
- Directing a fan towards the dog, or using air conditioning in house, or car

WHAT TO AVOID

- cooling too fast and producing a shivering response
- using ice which can cause vasoconstriction, preventing cooling of blood and may also damage the skin
- cooling too long causing 'rebound hyperthermia'

Active cooling is the most important aspect of treatment, although it may not wholly prevent deleterious effects

If possible, the owner should begin cooling the dog whilst travelling to the vet

One study revealed that dogs who were actively cooled before arriving at the vet surgery had a lower mortality rate (19%) than dogs not cooled prior to arrival (49%)

If you did not actually witness over-exertion in your dog, but think he may be suffering any of the symptoms associated with 'muscle meltdown' - sudden severe loss of muscle mass, listlessness, collapse, dehydration, passing dark urine (*due to excreting muscle pigment*) **TAKE TO THE VET IMMEDIATELY** for emergency fluid and electrolyte replacement. In severe cases of 'HER', in-patient care may necessary for effective treatment and recovery. Several weeks convalescence at home may be required. Medication may be indicated to help reduce muscle inflammation and subdue pain. Antibiotics may also be recommended by your vet to prevent secondary infection.

REMEMBER

- *Dogs concentrate on stimuli in a given moment and may not know when to stop*
- *When out for exercise, always have water available to drink as well as a 'spray bottle' of iced water*
- *In hot weather, squirt your dog with water frequently (wet his coat, his ears, his legs and belly)*
- *Keep your dog's strenuous activity to a moderate level – especially in warm weather, especially if excitable*
- *Act immediately at the first sign of exhaustion in your dog*