

Jasper

Jasper is a male, 16 month old Hungarian Vizsla, who to look at doesn't have a care in the world but unfortunately, both Jasper and ourselves have been to what feels like hell and back in the last 5 months and the future is still uncertain.

Up until Jasper was 11 months old, all was good and great in the world. He was the most adorable, lively cheeky chappie we could ever have wished for, fit and healthy and with energy to spare, until that fateful day, a day we'll never forget.

Out of the blue, one summer morning, to our horror Jasper was bed bound and drooling for England. We recounted our steps from the previous few days to try and account for Jasper's apparent dip in health and whilst nothing obvious could explain his condition, we assumed he was off colour today and under our watchful eye would be OK tomorrow. When tomorrow came...so did the horrendous retching and vomiting, relentless episodes that brought a tear to our eyes and clearly Jasper was in pain.

Our appointment at the local vets offered little explanation; initial diagnosis was difficult and understandably vague with potential respiratory problems a likely cause or so we thought. As the retching and drooling continued, Jasper started to having difficulties eating and drinking, typically only managing to swallow one out of every ten gulps of water and when he did manage to swallow any food, he soon vomited it up, add to this his vomiting of a best described substance of yellow mucus, it was clear that the initial prescribed anti inflammatory tablets were not tackling the problem and Jasper was in urgent need of another visit to the vets.

A hasty second visit to the vets failed to bring any conclusion or diagnosis to his condition. The vet took blood samples and introduced antibiotics to try and help alleviate the symptoms and it was at this time when Jasper lost all energy and started to lose weight, and left us in fear of him not making it through the next few days.

Finally Jasper was admitted into our vets for testing and x-rays, which highlighted a dilated oesophagus resulting in further testing for Megaesophagus but Jasper was eventually cleared of this, along with Addison's and Myasthenia Gravis. However one alarming symptom discovered via the blood tests, was the significantly elevated CK level. At this stage our vet realised that this was too complex for him to diagnose and Jasper was referred to Dick Whites Referral Centre in Newmarket.

At this stage we were becoming increasingly concerned as his health was waning. At our initial consultation at Dick Whites, we were informed that these were symptoms that they had recently seen in other young male Vizslas, who sadly didn't pull through. Jasper was admitted for further investigations which included blood work, urine analysis, imaging and gastrointestinal endoscopy. Gross abnormalities were noted in the stomach and small intestine, and the vets watched him eat and they witnessed his exaggerated swallowing and excessive drooling. They also performed a fluoroscopy. He was sent home until they had the results for these tests.

At this stage he was so lethargic, was totally off his food and was worryingly losing his muscle definition, especially around his head. It was so scary how quick he had deteriorated and he looked like a different dog. We were heart broken, we knew he was so unwell, and didn't want to see him in pain; however he was so young, we knew we had to keep going and fight for him to get better.

About a week later Dick White contacted us with the results, again the CK level in his blood was off the record. The results were indicating an Immune-mediated disease. They arranged for an urgent referral to the Animal Health Trust at Newmarket, where they have a Neurology Unit.

At this stage Jasper did seem to get a little better, and then worse, he was waxing and waning.

At this referral it was noted the elevated CK level and the pronounced loss of muscle suggested a primary myopathy and should be investigated to determine if it was an inherited degenerative disease, a metabolic myopathy or an inflammatory myopathy caused by infection.

Jasper had an EMG performed and muscle biopsies, he really looked like he had been in the wars. He had stitches, staples and shaved areas!

Samples of the biopsies were sent to San Diego in America to test, and we had to wait two weeks for the results.

The Animal Health Trust contacted us with the results, it they confirmed that Jasper had an immune-mediated disease, which they concluded he was born with; it was affecting his muscles, intestines and nervous system. His immune system was attacking itself!

He has an inflammatory and necrotising myopathy with antibodies against a sarcolemmal antigen which are typical of a subgroup of immune-mediated inflammatory myopathies. Of course this was not the diagnosis that we wanted as we were informed that his future was still uncertain, however after many long weeks of investigations it felt good to have some answers, so we could finally do something about it!

Jasper was immediately prescribed a regime of very high dose of immunosuppressive corticosteroids, which would hopefully be reduced in dosage after a 4 week period. We were warned of the side effects, but were not prepared for them!

The first side effect was the constant urinating, which last about a week. A week of no sleep for Jasper or us! Most of the time he couldn't actually get to the garden!

That finally got better; the next stage was the constant hunger! He will eat anything!!! We had to buy a muzzle, as he will eat anything and as his immune system is suppressed, we need to be careful that he doesn't catch anything.

His has really improved with the steroids, he strength is getting back to normal, day by day we can take him for longer walks, which we cherish, as at one point we didn't think we would be taking him to the park again.

The dosage was brought down after 4 weeks, and 6 weeks later we will be taking him to the vets again this week, hopefully to have the dosage taken down further.

Jasper is no longer the painfully skinny dog, we were so pleased that his muscle have started to return, even around his head, though he has slightly gone the other way and is a little tubby from his constant hunger!

At the moment, we are enjoying every moment with Jasper and are so pleased that he is showing signs of getting better, however the Vets did warn us that the overall prognosis is guarded, as there is always the fear of recurrence.

We hope that sharing Jasper's condition and the trials and tribulations that accompany it, will help anybody unfortunate enough to have to go through anything like this. As to the root cause of this condition, that remains in debate, but in order to preserve this wonderful and amazing breed of dog, it is imperative that this condition is taken seriously and quickly understood because fingers crossed Jasper may well recover but unfortunately not all previous cases have.

Sadly Jasper did not survive. He died in May 2007 at just under two years of age. Thanks to him and other early contributors to the research the prognosis for affected vizslas is now very much more optimistic - with prompt diagnosis and treatment the disease can usually be well controlled.