

Tick-Borne Illnesses
Marianne Minks
Zen Tao Tibetan Spaniels

This past Sat. am, my 5-year-old Tibbie (Tibetan Spaniel) "Tami" was paralyzed in her rear legs when she woke up. They just were collapsed under her. I rushed her to the vet and he was able to get deep pain response from both back feet, though one leg just dangled and showed no reflexes. She was knuckling over on both rear feet and could not place them flatly on the floor. She was alert and in no signs of pain.

The Vet examined her and could find no injuries or sensitive areas and thought it was a back injury. She was put on dexamethazone 2 x daily and crate rest. There was no improvement Sat, and Sun. am she had peed in her crate and was soaked, so I gave her a quick bath and put fans on her to dry her. Sun. night she had a little response in her rear legs, but could not walk. Mon. am she stood and took two steps before her rear legs collapsed. She made steady improvement on Mon and by Mon. night walked about 10 feet in the yard, peed, walked a couple more feet and had a BM. I thought she was on the mend.

Tues. am her rear was as bad as it had been Sat. am. She started showing weakness on her front legs and between Noon and 2:00 pm her front legs became paralyzed & she started having heart arhythmias. She began drooling on the ride to the vet office. Back to the Vet, who did back X-rays. Everything was normal looking. He then X-rayed her neck, which looked fine. He pulled blood and while we were waiting for the results he told me he didn't know what was wrong and that the vet school 100 miles away could do an electromyogram, MRI, etc. By this time it was 5:00 pm. He thought he would give her a cortisone injection. The bloodwork showed a high white count, pointing to infection. The Vet was petting her and feeling her all over again and couldn't understand why she was not in pain anywhere. He found an engorged tick under her ear - its color was identical to her coat there.

Then the AHA moment - tick paralysis! In his over 30 years practicing, he had only seen two cases. His other Vet who was working with him has been a Vet for about ten years and had never seen a case. He removed the tick, put her on amoxicillin two x daily and said she should be sitting up by evening and would recover. In my over thirty years in dogs I had never heard of it. My house dogs get a few ticks every year. I get a few ticks on me every time I mow. The tick can have a neurotoxin that is released while feeding that causes this. It can lead to respiratory failure and even death! From my reading about it on the net, different sources say in the US that death rates are 5% or 10-12%. By around 8:00 pm Tami was improving in the front legs and could lay upright on her front. She steadily improved overnight and could walk wobbly this morning (Wed). The Vet predicts a full recovery. I don't think she would have made it through the night without that tick being removed as the respiratory symptoms had begun and she was rapidly deteriorating from Noon on. I can't believe that I missed that tick, with how much I was handling her. But I didn't comb her out before or after her bath as I didn't want to stress her any more than I had to or to possibly injure her back. Now I will be obsessively on tick patrol.

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