

PNEUMONIA IN IRISH WOLFHOUNDS

DESERT IRISH WOLFHOUND ASSOCIATION
MEMBER MEETING



Pneumonia is one of the most common causes of death in Irish Wolfhounds after cancer and heart disease. It frequently has a sudden onset, and the severity of symptoms develop rapidly.

This is a disease of the middle-aged dog, usually 4 to 6.5 years of age and females have a higher rate of susceptibility.

The initial signs are subtle and initially may be easy to ignore, but being familiar with the symptoms will allow you to seek help in the very early stages, thereby increasing chances of a successful outcome.

PROBABLE SYMPTOMS MAY INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- The dog will be listless, uncomfortable, not wanting to lie down.
- They generally stand with their head and neck extended.
- Respirations are usually increased with occasional open mouth breathing.
- There may be a cough or nasal discharge, but this is not a common sign.
- There is, however, frequently a low-grade fever.

PROMPT TREATMENT IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE

It is critical that you go to your veterinarian immediately. If they are closed, go to an emergency room and stress that this is something that cannot wait. Most breeds of dogs have a slow onset, where an emergency office call is not generally indicated. This is not the case with Irish Wolfhounds, and you may have to impress upon your veterinarian the gravity of the situation and the rapidity of the disease. Irish Wolfhounds are not a common breed, and even the best veterinarian may not be aware of the intricacies of Irish Wolfhound pneumonia. Press for an x-ray, although they don't always show significant radio graphic changes and **insist** strongly on a powerful antibiotic.

They will also be able to assess whether oxygen levels are adequate as well as hydration. This may require oxygen supplementation as well as intravenous fluids. Antibiotics should be continued at least three weeks after all symptoms have abated. Do not be alarmed if antibiotics are required as long as six to eight weeks.

Irish Wolfhound pneumonias are almost 100% bacterial in nature. The bacteria generally found on the culture are the same that would be found in the pharyngeal and oral areas of the canine mouth.

Erythromycin or a combination of baytril and clavamox should be highly effective.

Irish Wolfhound pneumonia is not caused by a virus or lack of ciliary function in the respiratory tract. These were probable causes that have been eliminated after a number of research trials. There is a different pneumonia in young Irish Wolfhound puppies and adolescents that is associated with decreased ciliary function. They almost always have some sort of nasal discharge. They show symptoms from a young age, and then progress to pneumonia. This is believed to be a hereditary

condition unlike the more common middle age onset pneumonia, which does not at this time seem to have any genetic origins.

There have been a number of research trials that have eliminated the factors that were previously thought to be causative agents in the pneumonia. This includes lack of ciliary function and virus. Laryngeal paralysis and esophageal low motility have also long been thought to play a part of this disease, but research at this point indicates that neither plays a significant role.

Bronchiectasis, however, appears to play a very important part of Irish Wolfhound pneumonia. Bronchiectasis (BE) develops when the bronchioles become lax and their muscle function diminished, causing the bronchioles to become dilated. This impedes the air flow both in and out, causing stagnant airflow. There is not enough muscle power to forcefully push the air in and out of the bronchioles, therefore producing a stasis where bacteria can collect and the pneumonia then ensues. Bronchiectasis is a progressive disease and when mild there are minimal symptoms, however, the more severe the bronchiectasis, the more likelihood of pneumonia. It is not a reversible condition, and therefore at least 50% of the dogs will have a recurrence of pneumonia within 3 to 4 months.

These pulmonary changes are similar to laxity and slow muscle loss that we see as a normal aging process in other parts of the body, which may be why this is the disease of the aging Wolfie.

There are still a number of research projects going on, and hopefully we will gain more insight to this problem, and a more effective way of diagnosing early...treating and hopefully minimizing reoccurrence.

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