



UNDERSTANDING SPIROCERCOSIS — the silent killer.

Spirocerca Lupi is a worm that completes its life cycle in dogs and causes severe, potentially life threatening diseases. Your dog can pick up this worm from eating beetles - the dung beetles usually associated with Spirocerca infections are only approximately 6mm in length and are not the large, conspicuous dung beetles. It is also thought that dogs can be infected by eating mice, rats, lizards or birds. These little animals can carry worm larvae which your dog ingests when eating them. The larvae are released into your dog's digestive tract, after which they move through the intestinal walls and into your dog's bloodstream.

The most common path for the larvae is to move from the intestines to the aorta which is a large blood vessel, where they burrow through the walls of this blood vessel, weakening the walls and causing aneurisms. From the aorta they move back to the oesophagus where they form large nodules inside the oesophagus. They then grow into worms and lay eggs.

Nodules within the oesophagus are initially small and grow bigger with time.

As these lumps start to grow bigger, **your dog may show bouts of fever, coughing, vomiting, gagging or regurgitating food due to difficulty swallowing, poor appetite, weight loss or lethargy.** Some dogs become anaemic because some nodules may bleed, which can cause a very dark or even black stool due to the presence of blood in the stool. These nodules may turn cancerous and the cancer can spread. Sudden death can occur if an aneurism in the aorta ruptures, causing your dog to bleed out in seconds.

How is it diagnosed?

The ideal method for diagnosis is endoscopy, which means placing a camera into the oesophagus in order to visualise the nodules and worms. This is the best method for diagnosis as it can diagnose your dog early on in the disease process, making treatment more successful. The procedure is performed under General Anaesthetic.

How is it treated?

Once your dog has been diagnosed, the appropriate treatment will be decided by your vet. The treatment process is lengthy, initially starting with daily or weekly treatments for 6 to 8 weeks, then moving onto monthly treatments for several months. If your dog is left untreated it will eventually succumb to the disease. The earlier the treatment is started, the more successful it is.

How do I prevent it?

Using spot on treatment such as Advocate or deworming using Milbemax tablets on a monthly basis are preventative measures. Removing faeces off the lawn regularly will help to reduce the amount of beetles being attracted into the garden, helping you reduce the chance of your dog accidentally ingesting a beetle. These preventative measures can help to safeguard your dog not only from the dangers of the Spirocerca Lupi worm but also against the threat of some of the other nasty types of worms.

This disease can progress very slowly and symptoms may seem mild in the beginning but if left untreated it can result in severe, life threatening disease. **If you notice any unusual symptoms in your pet, rather be safe than sorry and visit their vet.**

