

# Idiopathic or “Old Dog” Vestibular Disease

## *Often misdiagnosed incorrectly as a stroke*

**What is it?** The disease refers to the sudden, non-progressive disturbance of balance. The vestibular system (inner ear) is responsible for maintaining normal balance. It provides the brain with vital information regarding body position with respect to gravity. Sensory information such as if the dog is upside down, right side up, falling, accelerating. When the dysfunction occurs it is often associated with the peripheral system (inner ear). This condition is often misdiagnosed as a dog having had a stroke and many owners report their dogs as appearing to walk like a “drunken sailor”. Some vets may jump to a drastic conclusion that the dog has a brain tumor and recommended euthanizing unnecessarily, when in fact this is a very common disease that affects many geriatric dogs.

**What are the signs?** The primary signs are the sudden onset loss of balance, disorientation, head tilt and irregular and jerking eye movements. Many dogs may not be able to stand or walk and if they do try may fall over in the direction their head is tilting.

**HEAD TILT ~ HEAD SHAKING ~ CIRCLING IN ONE DIRECTION ~ ATAXIA (STUMBLING, STAGGERING, LACK OF COORDINATION) ~ EYES RAPIDLY MOVING ~ VOMITING**

**How is it diagnosed?** Diagnosis is often made using medical history, clinical signs, blood and urine tests. Further testing such as x-rays or an MRI may be requested.

**What are the causes of vestibular dysfunction?** The cause is usually unknown or commonly described as idiopathic origin. Once all other possible causes have been eliminated such as a severe ear mite infection, underactive thyroid, brain lesion issues, middle ear infection, etc then generally the diagnosis reverts to Vestibular “old dog” disease.

**Is the dog in pain?** No, this disease is not considered to be painful. If the signs of the disease are so severe you may want to consider IV and some injectable anti-nausea medications.

**How do I treat it?** Time! The sudden onset symptoms can be very concerning to the dog owner but be patient. Most symptoms start to improve within three days and almost completely resolve within two weeks. The head tilt correct may take a bit longer.



*Reese, a super senior adoption by proud parents Agnes & Doug and a senior that was affected by this disease*