



SCOTTISH TERRIER CLUB OF AMERICA

CUPS, Idiopathic Stomatitis, or Contact Mucositis

By Any Name, This is Bad News

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This article highlights one of the more serious oral health issues that Scotties may face.

What is CUPS?

Chronic Ulcerative Paradental Stomatitis or “CUPS” is a painful and often debilitating disease of the mouth involving the gums, the mucous membranes of the cheek, the lips, the roof of the mouth, and the tongue. These are the “paradental” tissues, not the teeth themselves. Some dogs afflicted with CUPS also have periodontal disease with heavy build-up on the teeth, inflamed, swollen bleeding gums, infection, and bone loss. However, many dogs with CUPS have normal looking teeth with very little periodontal disease present. What we do see in dogs with CUPS are painful ulcers or erosions on the gums, on the membranes of the inside of the cheek, on the roof of the mouth, and even on the tongue.

What causes this disease?

Veterinary dental experts are not certain of the exact cause of CUPS, but they do know that the ulcers arise in tissues which come in contact with the teeth, so called “kissing” ulcers. CUPS ulcers may result from an initial injury, but in many cases there is no known instigating cause. The severity of this disease intensifies due to an overreaction of the dog’s own immune system to the plaque on the tooth’s surface. Plaque is the creamy, smelly substance on the teeth that is formed continuously from food particles, bacteria and debris in the mouth. Over time plaque leads to gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) and hardens into calculus, which adheres tightly to the tooth surface and must be scaled to be removed. Plaque therefore plays a key role in both periodontal disease and CUPS. Furthermore, there is reason to suspect that CUPS has a genetic component in some breeds such as the Maltese, Greyhound and King Charles Spaniel. Unfortunately, CUPS has also been reported in Scotties.

What are the symptoms of CUPS?

Some of the more common symptoms include horribly bad breath, excessive drooling with thick, ropy and at times bloody saliva, pain in and around the mouth, and difficulty eating. Obviously other conditions can cause these symptoms, such as oral cancer, injury and abscesses, kidney disease, and other immune mediated diseases, so a trip to the vet is needed for diagnosis

What is the treatment for CUPS?

Before a treatment plan can be ordered, a complete oral exam must be performed under anesthesia. Dental x-rays, blood work, and a thorough cleaning of the teeth with examination of the ulcers will be done. Your vet will extract any unhealthy teeth and may even remove some healthy teeth that are in direct contact with

severe ulcers. For the remaining teeth, the long-term plan will involve daily teeth brushing, oral rinses, prescribed medications to reduce the pain and inflammation, and a course of antibiotic therapy.

Is there a cure?

For dedicated owners willing to stay vigilant and work hard on the plan, there may be some degree of success. But many times, in spite of our best efforts, the pain, ulcers and eating disorders return. It is not easy to stay ahead of microscopic plaque development, and remember that CUPS is an immune mediated disease, making prevention doubly difficult. If there is a relapse, extraction of all the remaining teeth may be needed. This sounds drastic, but CUPS calls for drastic measures! Removing the teeth removes the plaque, which is the source of the exaggerated immune response, the inflammation and the pain. Along with full dental extractions, the alveoli (the holes in the jaw where the teeth used to sit) are curetted and smoothed to ensure that the infection will not extend further into the bones of the skull. Many times the dog will feel better almost immediately and begin eating again. Some former CUPS patients go on to live a regular lifespan after extraction of all the teeth, and they apparently have no difficulty gumming their kibble. The tongue may loll out of the mouth on occasion, but that is small price to pay for a pain-free life.

Is there anything we can do to avoid CUPS?

Probably not, in certain individuals. Their genetic course may be already set. To be safe, any dog known to be affected with CUPS should not be used for breeding at any time.

More than 75% of pets 3 years of age and older in the US are already developing some degree of dental disease. So a good plan for all Scotties is to keep the plaque from building up with daily brushing. Starting at a young age, any Scottie will learn to tolerate and even enjoy the daily routine. Use a soft child's toothbrush and toothpaste formulated for pets that is designed to be swallowed. Concentrate on the outside surfaces of the teeth, both top and bottom. Have your vet examine the teeth closely at each wellness visit and perform a dental cleaning under anesthesia when needed. Let's keep our Scotties as healthy and long-lived as we possibly can with good dental care!