NORTH MACLEAN
Family Vet

Shop 2, 4656-4664 Mt Lindesay Hwy
North Maclean QLD 4280 Ph: 3297 0803
reception@northmacleanfamilyvet.com.au
www.northmacleanfamilyvet.com.au
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Greyhounds & Fibrinolytic Syndrome

Fibrin is an important protein produced by the body in response to bleeding and forms a major component of clots. Once a clot forms, the body starts to heal around the damaged area. Fibrinolysis (breaking down of fibrin) occurs later as the body heals itself. However, in some animals, particularly greyhounds, a clot may dissolve too early and bleeding can start again. This is known as Fibrinolytic Syndrome.
Up to 30% of greyhounds suffer from this potentially life-threatening bleeding disorder. The bleeding often occurs around 36 to 48 hours after a procedure or traumatic incident. This may present with the animal having bleeding problems in the days following surgery, seen as severe bruising, bleeding from wounds or even internally which can require fluid therapy, blood transfusions or even further surgery.

What signs are seen with Fibrinolytic Syndrome?

Delayed bleeding often manifests as skin bruising extending from the surgical wound to surrounding areas, which can persist for days. In some cases, skin bruising can happen in combination with active bleeding from the surgical wounds, as well as delayed sloughing of the skin and underlying tissue.

What causes Fibrinolytic Syndrome?

The bleeding can be due to abnormal fibrin stabilisation, enhanced fibrinolysis, or a clotting factor deficiency. In addition, blood vessel wall damage or dysfunction, such as those in sepsis, can also result in generalised bleeding post-operatively. Unfortunately, we don't know why it occurs, or which individuals will be affected, but it may be a genetic predisposition. We also don't know why some individuals get Fibrinolytic Syndrome when they have been apparently fine during previous surgeries.

How is Fibrinolytic Syndrome diagnosed?

The common blood count values and clotting times are often normal. It is generally believed the bleeding is related to enhanced fibrinolysis or weaker clot strength. Diagnosis is often made based on history and clinical presentation.

What treatment is involved?

As delayed bleeding appears to be related to the maintenance of the fibrin clot and the enhanced fibrinolysis, treatment with anti-fibrinolytic medications during the immediate post-operative period is recommended. We recommend starting this medication within 24hrs after surgery or after trauma. This medication needs to be given three times a day for 5-7 days, and is the best option to prevent any major bleeding or clotting issues.
Tranexamic acid (TXA) is an anti-fibrinolytic medication. It decreases fibrinolysis and increases clot strength. Even though this medication significantly reduces the frequency and severity of bleeding, delayed bleeding may still occur in some patients. In addition, these medications are not licensed for use in companion animals but have been shown to be beneficial in greyhounds undergoing surgical procedures.

If you have any questions regarding your pet's diagnosis or treatment plan, please contact our friendly team on 07 3297 0803 or come in and speak with us.