

Anemia in Dogs

Overview

If your dog has [anemia](#), there's been a drop in the number of his red blood cells. Red blood cells carry oxygen to the cells in the body and pick up carbon dioxide. A low red blood cell count can be the result of blood loss, the destruction of the red blood cells, or an inadequate production of new red blood cells.

There are many causes of anemia, including excessive blood loss due to trauma, immune-mediated diseases (when the body attacks its own cells or organs), cancer, genetic defects, [kidney disease](#) (or diseases in the other major organs), infectious diseases and bone marrow disease. Human and pet [medications](#), as well as certain [foods](#), can also bring about this condition. Onions, for instance, don't only cause [bad breath](#); they can also cause anemia!

Risks

All [dogs](#) can get anemia in one form or another, because there are so many different conditions and [diseases](#) that result in an anemic state. For example, if your dog has a [parasitic](#) infestation, such as [worms](#) or [fleas](#), she could experience blood loss and anemia—another reason why flea and tick prevention is so important!

Certain medications, like [cancer](#)-therapy drugs and anti-inflammatory drugs, can also increase the risk of anemia.

Signs

Warning signs that your dog is anemic or becoming anemic include:

- [Pale gums](#)
- Acting tired, weak, or listless
- Faster-than-normal pulse
- [Lack of appetite](#)
- [Weight loss](#)
- [Black, tarry stools](#)
- Eating dirt

These signs can vary from pet to pet and really depend on the underlying cause of the anemia. In some situations, your dog may present no signs at all!

Diagnosis/Treatment

When a dog is anemic, it is crucial to identify the underlying cause. Your veterinarian may recommend various tests, depending on your dog's symptoms and history.

These tests may include:

- A complete blood count to identify how anemic your dog is and evaluate the characteristics of the red blood cells
- A reticulocyte count to identify if your dog's body is responding to the anemia and making new red blood cells*
- A blood film to look for parasites and blood cell abnormalities
- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver and pancreatic function as well as sugar levels
- Electrolyte tests to ensure your dog isn't dehydrated or suffering from an electrolyte imbalance
- A complete urinalysis to rule out urinary tract infections and to evaluate the kidney's ability to concentrate urine
- Specialized tests that can help identify underlying infectious disease (e.g., various titers or PCR testing)

Treatment of anemia depends on the underlying condition. It includes stopping blood loss as well as treatment of bacterial, viral, toxic, and autoimmune conditions. If the anemia is severe, a blood transfusion may be necessary.

Prevention

Since anemia is caused by other conditions, it is best to focus on prevention of those conditions. Protecting your dog from common parasites by using preventives is important, as well as contacting your veterinarian immediately if you see any signs of anemia.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.