



## Polymyositis in the Hungarian Vizsla – some FAQs

Recently polymyositis has been diagnosed in two Australian Hungarian Vizslas. A breed-specific polymyositis has only fairly recently been recognised by the veterinary community, and these are the first cases that we are aware that been diagnosed here. In the UK there are at least 56 cases that fit the inclusion criteria for research that is being undertaken into the disease. We say 'at least' because now that vets and owners are more aware of the condition, some cases may now be going directly to the researchers. Several cases in North America have also been reported.

### What is polymyositis?

Polymyositis (PM) is a disease where there is long term inflammation of the muscles. The inflammation mainly targets and damages the skeletal muscles (the ones associated with movement), but researchers have found that in Vizslas it may also affect the heart muscle.

The oesophageal muscle in dogs is composed of skeletal muscle (unlike in people where there is skeletal muscle in the upper part, smooth muscle in the lower part, and a mixture of the two in the middle), so the dogs ability to swallow is also compromised.



'Kodiak' before diagnosis of polymyositis

### What happens in a dog with PM?

Inflammation of the muscles leads to muscle weakness, pain and wasting of the muscles. There can be infectious causes of PM in dogs, but in the Hungarian Vizslas that have been affected these causes have been ruled out. The process occurring in PM appears to be an immune-mediated (autoimmune) one; that is the dog's body attacks its own muscle fibres.

### What are the signs of PM?



'Kodiak' after diagnosis of polymyositis

- Difficulty swallowing both food and water (this is called dysphagia)
- Wasting (atrophy) of muscles of the head that are involved with eating

Affected dogs may also have;

- Regurgitation of food (regurgitation is different to vomiting)
- Excessive drooling of saliva
- Difficulty and/or pain on opening the jaw
- Generalised muscle weakness and exercise intolerance, with possible general muscle atrophy
- Enlarged oesophagus
- Blood tests show highly elevated muscle enzymes which indicate breakdown of muscles (but if the disease has gone on for some time, these levels will not be as high)

The eating and swallowing problems and muscle wasting etc have been noticed at the beginning of the Vizsla's illness, and not at the end of a protracted process. Dysphagia with/without drooling and muscle atrophy are not indicative of a specific disease and can be seen in other disorders. Similarly elevated muscle enzymes are supportive but by themselves are not diagnostic of PM, so the vets need to do various tests to differentiate and exclude other possible conditions.



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### How does a dog get PM, and what is being done to prevent it from occurring?

We do not know what causes PM, nor how it might be inherited, nor if it is a predisposition that is inherited (like the predisposition to develop allergies or diabetes). In general for immune-mediated diseases, an appropriate genetic background must be present for disease to occur. Several affected dogs in the UK have been closely related, whilst there are others whom have no known affected close relatives. Research in the UK is currently being undertaken (<http://www.veterinary-neurologist.co.uk/vizsla.htm>) to determine the cause and possible inheritance of this condition in Vizslas. They are collecting DNA from affected individuals, together with samples from litter mates and from parents of affected dogs.

The HVCNSW is supporting this study and is sponsoring DNA collection of Hungarian Vizslas in Australia that meet the inclusion criteria of the research. The DNA will be collected using “saliva sampling swabs” (“mouth mops”). The researchers think that these “mouth mops” are better than the brushes/swabs that some collections use because samples are easy to collect, and the technology provides a good quality, stable DNA sample.

### Is this like the ‘head problems’ we’ve seen before?

Several people have contacted us asking if this is like the head problems that have been seen in the breed in the past. Some of the appearance and signs might be the same, but this potentially a very serious condition for the dog; several Hungarian Vizslas with PM have died as a result of the disease, even when they have had lots of veterinary support. We have prepared some information on the various different ‘head conditions’ reported in Australian Vizslas, and that is also included in our newsletter (and now also available on our website – Feb 2011)

### Further information

For further information on polymyositis in Vizslas see;

Where the research in the UK is being undertaken <http://www.veterinary-neurologist.co.uk/vizsla.htm>

THE laboratory where many diagnostic tests for neuromuscular diseases are performed. (Note: the VCA health survey that is referred to, is now complete)

<http://vetneuromuscular.ucsd.edu/cases/2007/Sept07.html>

“Important muscle diseases in the Vizsla dog: what my veterinarian should know to reach a correct diagnosis” by G. Diane Shelton (of the laboratory above). This information was reproduced in the **June/July 2008 Vizsla Views** [http://www.vcaweb.org/health/Health\\_Muscle\\_Disease.pdf](http://www.vcaweb.org/health/Health_Muscle_Disease.pdf)

Further information including videos of affected Hungarian Vizslas

<http://www.vizslamyositis.blogspot.com/>

Abstracts about PM presented at veterinary conferences:

“Breed specific polymyositis in the Hungarian Vizsla dog” by AC Haley, SR Platt, M Kent, SJ Schatzberg, A Durham, S Cochrane & GD Shelton. Presented at the 2009 ACVIM Forum and Canadian Veterinary Medical Association Convention  
<http://www.acvim.org/websites/acvim/File/Haley.pdf>

“Myositis and pharyngeal dysphagia in Hungarian Vizslas” by RD Foale, M Whiting & JD Wray. Presented at the 2008 BSAVA Annual Congress  
<http://www.vizslahealth.net/BSAVA%202008.htm>

**New**

Published case report:

“Breed-Specific Polymyositis in Hungarian Vizsla Dogs” by AC Haley, SR Platt, M Kent, SJ Schatzberg, A Durham, S Cochrane, D Westworth, and GD Shelton. J Vet Intern Med 2011  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1939-1676.2010.0660.x/abstract>



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**December 2006/January 2007 Vizsla Views**

**April/May 2008 Vizsla Views**

**August/September 2010 Vizsla Views**

**October/November 2010 Vizsla Views**

Written by: Karyn Orzeszko  
Originally published in August/September 2010 Vizsla Views  
Revised: February, 2011