

IMP Information Sheet

WHAT IS IMP?

Put simply, it is inflammation within multiple joints caused by an invasion of white cells from the immune system flooding the joints. This process causes pain and sometimes fever coupled with a loss in appetite.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF IMP?

- Your Cavalier may be reluctant to stand and may cry when getting up, or walking. They will usually not stretch upon waking and may not bark as normal
- Your Cavalier may walk very gently as if walking on egg shells
- Your Cavalier may show signs of pain when touched around the back, neck or joint areas
- Your Cavalier may have a fever or have lost their appetite

HOW IS IMP DIAGNOSED?

If your vet thinks that your Cavalier has IMP, then the likelihood will be that you will be referred to a specialist for treatment. Once referred, if your consultant suspects IMP, then your Cavalier will require a joint tap.

This involves a small syringe being inserted into multiple joints and fluid being withdrawn from the joints for analysis within a laboratory. This process can take a few days to produce definitive results.

WHAT HAPPENS IF IMP IS DIAGNOSED?

There are two causes of IMP. Firstly, there is an underlying infection or disease that has caused your Cavaliers immune system to go into overdrive. Instead of the immune system fighting the initial infection, it also starts attacking your Cavaliers own tissues.

To find out if your Cavalier has a secondary disease, further tests may be needed which can range from blood and urine tests through to X-rays and ultrasound.

If an underlying infection is found then the IMP is classified as Secondary/systemic IMP

The second cause of IMP is that there is no secondary infection present in your Cavalier and for some unknown reason; your Cavaliers immune system is attacking the joints with no apparent motive.

If this is the case, then this type of IMP is classified as Primary/Idiopathic IMP.

SO WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

Treatment will depend upon what type of IMP your Cavalier has been diagnosed with. If an underlying cause has been identified and is then treated, this treatment may rectify the secondary IMP infection, however, this is not always the case and the IMP will need to be treated.

Treatment for IMP tends to commence with a fairly high dose of Prednisone which is a steroid acting to suppress the immune system and your Cavalier will normally respond well showing improvement within a few days of starting treatment. As Prednisone is a steroid, it cannot be simply stopped and will be reduced over time and potentially mixed with other drugs during a fairly lengthy course of treatment over several months.

Many dogs will react to steroids and some of the side effects include:

- Increased thirst and subsequent urine output
- Increased appetite which can seem ravenous at times
- Increased panting when warm
- Muscle weakness and degradation
- Sometime there can be issues with liver function

Other drugs that can be used to compliment the prednisone are:

- Denamarin – A liver supplement
- Cyclosporine – This is another immune suppressing drug
- Sucralfate /Asceptin – This is a stomach protector as steroids may cause some internal bleeding
- Ranatadine – This is another stomach protecting drug, again designed to prevent bleeding

WILL MY CAVALIER RECOVER?

At this point, I cannot answer this. Every case is different and as our Cavalier is still undergoing treatment, we simply don't know the answer to this. Our Cavalier is currently on a combination of the above drugs and continues to improve. His latest examination was all good news as there was no evidence of swelling or inflammation in his joints and his range of movement is excellent. He will hopefully make a full recovery, but as no underlying condition has been identified, we are aware that IMP could re-occur in the future.

The only definitive test to determine if the joints are clear is a further joint tap, however, our consultant advises that it may not be absolutely necessary if there is continued improvement on a similar scale and clinical tests show no issues.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I SHOULD KNOW?

- If you own a cavalier, then you know that insurance is a must. IMP is an expensive disease to treat and can quickly eat into £4,000 of cover each year.
- IMP is an awful condition as it can take some time to diagnose. Be prepared for sleepless nights for a while.
- Even whilst recovering, your Cavalier may show an objection to walking up stairs, jumping up onto the sofa or bed (yes, Ours sleeps upstairs). Jumping down is not normally a problem
- Cavaliers can have sensitive tummy's so be prepared for runny tum with the cocktail of drugs. This can normally be stopped by giving a pro-biotic.
- If IMP has been diagnosed, it's a long road to recovery, but most dogs according to studies do make a full recovery.