

Lyme Disease: An Akita's Story

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Lyme Disease

a little limp leads to big problems

Our co-worker Brenda's Akita, Kayao-sa, turned up lame one day in her rear left leg.

Brenda quickly checked all areas of Kayao's leg and hip and found nothing. However, two hours later her limp was much worse.

Brenda brought Kayao into a local animal hospital, where the veterinarian checked her knee and diagnosed Kayao with a partially torn cruciate ligament. She was given 2 weeks worth of the prescription non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) Novox, which seemed to take care of the limp. However, the limp returned - this time in the right front leg - one week after the medication was completed.

Brenda comes from Ohio where there is not a great prevalence of Lyme disease, so Kayao was never vaccinated for the disease when she moved to Wisconsin. When she brought her into the veterinarian again they immediately did a blood test for Lyme which came up as a strong positive. Kayao was put on a 21 day cycle of Doxycycline, a prescription antibiotic. However, one day after completing her course of doxycycline Kayao started to limp again. She is currently on another 21 day cycle in hopes of effectively eradicating the disease.

Unfortunately Lyme disease is not an uncommon story.

HOW LYME IS TRANSMITTED

Transmission of Lyme disease is primarily through the bite of a tick.



For a nymph (immature tick) or adult tick to transmit the bacteria that causes Lyme (*Borrelia burgdorferi*), it must be attached to the host for at least 24-48 hours. If a tick dies or is removed within this 24-48 hour period, transmission of the bacteria will not occur. Even if a tick is a carrier of *B. burgdorferi* and it attaches to the dog for more than 48 hours, the dog may not contract the disease. In fact, studies show that only around 10% of dogs that are exposed will contract the disease.



SYMPTOMS

Clinical illness usually occurs 2 to 5 months after initial exposure and the likelihood and severity of the disease seems to vary with the animal's age and immune status. Dogs show several different forms of the disease, but by far, the most common symptoms are a fever of between 103°F and 105°F, shifting leg lameness, swelling in the joints, lethargy, and lack of appetite. Appropriate antibiotics need to be administered as soon as a diagnosis is made.



PREVENTION AND VACCINATION

Tick control is probably the most important thing an owner can do to prevent Lyme disease in their pet. Avoid areas of high tick infestation during periods when ticks are active. Remember, a single tick can spread the disease.

Using insecticides that repel ticks on the dog is recommended. With the advent of [once-a-month topical insecticides](#), tick control has become a lot easier and more effective. [Tick collars](#) containing amitraz have been shown to be an effective addition to tick control.

Vaccination in tick-infested areas is also a great idea. There are several [vaccines](#) on the market that are licensed for use in dogs. However, since vaccines are not 100%



effective, tick control is still recommended.

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