



53/2 Moo 7, T.Sanpuleui, A.DoI Saket, Chiang Mai 50220, Tel.: 09 – 99 78 146

[www.luckydogs.info](http://www.luckydogs.info)

Email: [lucky4paws@yahoo.com](mailto:lucky4paws@yahoo.com)

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## **Ehrlichiosis Canis, a dreaded and deadly killer**

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“Doctor my dog, Lucky, is coughing a deep dry cough but, further, she seems very fine. As pup she survived Canine Distemper and, since, she sometimes has this cough”. The veterinary prescribed some antibiotics and recovery followed quickly. A year later: “Doctor she’s less lively then usual and doesn’t finish her meals anymore, sometimes even skips one”. Diagnose: liver problem, but cause ‘unknown’. She was put on a liver diet with supporting pills and was back to ‘normal’ within the shortest time. Again months later, after a day of vigorous play, a seizure and very pale gums, 15 minutes later everything is back to ‘normal’. Next evening same story. Veterinarian’s diagnosis: chronic Ehrlichiosis Canis.

Picture: Lucky, Ms. Nienke’s best friend, looked still very string and healthy, only a few months before she died.

Ehrlichiosis Canis (in short: E. Canis) is an infectious disease caused by a blood borne parasite, that lives and multiplies in the white blood cells causing them to die, ultimately weakening the immune system by inhibiting the basic function of the bone marrow – that of making new cells to replace the old and dying ones. This is followed by a



devastating effect on the lymphatic system and other systems, organs and cells.

The disease has spread world-wide and has claimed already the lives of many dogs. In Thailand, the disease is known as Tick-Fever and is an alarming problem under the dogs.

Transmission is through the bite of the brown dog tick. A wide variety of wild and domesticated animals serve as reservoir. Unchecked donor animals, used in veterinary clinics, can also pass on the disease.

Three clinical stages are observed: acute, sub-clinical and chronic. The acute stage can be very subtle, usually mimicking a mild viral infection, and often going unnoticed. Multiple symptoms can include weakness, intermittent fever, (temporarily) loss of appetite, (light) eye and nasal discharge, swelling of the limbs, cough, vomiting bile, soft feces, diarrhea, weight loss, arthritis, neck or back pain, muscle wasting, rash, increased thirst and urination, incontinence, sensitivity of the skin, depleted coat, depression, pale gums, bleeding tendencies, seizures, etc. The acute stage often lasts 2 to 4 weeks, followed with the dog either recovers but remaining persistently infected (i.e. the sub-clinical stage, which can last up to 5 years) or enters the chronic stage where parasite enters the bone marrow.

Diagnosis of E. Canis was made on the basis of the history, clinical signs and the support of laboratory test. However, the chance of detecting the parasite in the white blood cells was less than 30% (my boxer, Lucky, has been tested for blood parasites several times through the years, but the results have always been negative, even during the final stage of her disease). Since not too long, there is a different method where, through a special test kit called the SNAP test, the blood is tested for antibodies to this parasite. This method is much more accurate!

Treatment is through specific kinds of antibiotics and supplementation of liver supporting vitamins. It is during the acute stage that treatment is most effective and most, if not all, damage can be reversed and a full recovery is possible. Once the parasite has entered the bone marrow, the damage done is irreversible. A peculiarity about the disease is – dogs in their chronic stage often do not look or act sick until their final hours. That is why alertness to the first symptoms are so important.

But of course, prevention is the best cure, that is to keep your dog tick free. This is not as easy as it looks as ticks thrive in the hot and humid climate of this country and already have shown resistance to tick control medicines such as Frontline and Revolution in epidemic areas. Therefore, best remedy, both as a preventive matter as well as during treatment once infected, is keeping your dog's immune system in top condition by providing it a various and nutritious natural diet!

In case of doubt consult your veterinarian and do the SNAP test.

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