

Let's Talk Greyhounds™

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Issue 1#

The Newsletter with News, Views and Practical Advice

From the **Editor**.....

Welcome to our inaugural issue of "Let's Talk Greyhounds™". In over 30 years working with trainers and their greyhounds, as well as writing for the Greyhound Star™ for the last 27 years, I have found that greyhound enthusiasts, young and old, appreciate information and helpful hints on the training and care of their greyhounds.

"Let's Talk Greyhounds™" will be published at 6-8 week intervals to provide you with reviews on common problems, briefs on feeding, care and management, as well as practical 'Helpful Hints' in each issue.

The issues will be available by e-mail by emailing your name and your email address to info@stargreyhoundproducts.com and registering your email details.

You will only receive the regular issue of "Let's Talk Greyhounds™" in colour as soon as they are published. You will not be bombarded with other promotional literature and your email details will not be given to a third party.

In this issue, we provide a review of cramping and short brief on post-race distress syndrome, as well as a number of 'Helpful Hints'.

We hope that you enjoy reading "Let's Talk Greyhounds™" and I look forward to providing you with a practical source of information to help your greyhounds in future issues.

Good racing

Dr. John Kohnke BVSc RDA



In this Issue:

- **Cramping- Avoiding the Problem**
- **Post-Race Distress Syndrome - The Research Continues**

Plus Helpful Hints and Much More

Helpful Hint 1: Managing a 'Fighter'

Greyhounds which 'turn their head' or 'fight' during a race can be a real problem. There are lots of theories as to why greyhounds 'fight' when racing in a group. Some believe that 90% of dogs 'fight' due to aggression, with 90% of bitches turning their head as in play during a race. Observations indicate that greyhounds are more likely to 'fight' if the weather is hot, a greyhound is tired from repeating racing, carrying an injury and exhibits pain by 'turning the head'.

There are a number of ways to help manage a repeat offender. Have the greyhound thoroughly checked over for injury, especially the toes and a sore right hip support area as a greyhound may move left against another greyhound when racing and 'turn its head'. In some cases, a dog with a retained testicle may run to one side or become aggressive - seek advice from your vet. One way is to run the greyhound in a solo trial for 4-5 gallops so that it is unable to 'turn its head'. Unfortunately, repeat offenders are hard to correct and often retirement is the only alternative, especially if the greyhound appears to become very aggressive towards other greyhounds.

Helpful Hint 2: How to Estimate Optimum Racing Weight

It is well established that greyhounds run more consistently within a narrow body weight range. Many trainers appraise a greyhound relative to its conditions and the presence of a 'fitness line' from the lower chest over the ribs to the flank. Another method is to trial the greyhound over a uniform distance suited to its speed and fitness level at varying weights of 500g above or below the first weight and evaluate its performance. Once the greyhound wins at a given weight, even after a couple of races, it becomes its ideal racing weight.

Post-Race Distress Syndrome – the Research Continues

In each race meeting, on average one or more greyhounds will suffer physical or exhaustive stress. The incidence is higher in greyhounds which are excitable, dehydrated or not fit for the speed or distance. The affected greyhound may become in co-ordinated, show nervous distress, muscle twitches and collapse within a minute or so after the race. Heart and respiratory rates often remain elevated during the episode and referred to as the “thumps”. A small number of greyhounds collapse and die within an hour after a hard race. Recent observations and blood tests carried out on greyhounds in Australia and the UK suggest that the underlying cause could result from low blood calcium or magnesium, excess levels of brain endorphins, electrolyte imbalances and lack of adequate muscle antioxidants. More investigations are under way to try to narrow down the possible causes so that management can be used to reduce the risk in racing greyhounds.

Until more is known, it is suggested to ensure that a greyhound is adequately hydrated before a race and supplements of calcium, magnesium, electrolytes and antioxidants are provided.

How to Mince Chicken

Chicken meat is often available at a reasonable cost and can be used for short periods in place of red meat. Chicken meat, being a white meat like fish, has only about a quarter of the iron content of red meat (0.6mg iron/100g for chicken compared to 2.3mg iron/100g for beef). If fed as the sole meat base for more than 3 weeks, without a supplement of 15mg of iron daily, a greyhound may become anaemic and fail to finish strongly. If you are planning to feed chicken meat, you should remove the skin before mincing as the skin, even whole fresh chickens with skin prepared for human consumption, can be contaminated with Salmonella germs. If these establish in the bowel, the greyhound can develop a high temperature, severe diarrhoea and dehydrate if not treated promptly by a vet. Thoroughly wash the chicken meat with clean, running water after the skin is removed and dry off before mincing. Always check the mince for small, sharp bone fragments before feeding. It is unwise to store chicken mince, even if it is refrigerated, for more than a few hours after mincing.

Helpful Hint 3: Removing a Tick

Occasionally a dog tick will attach to a greyhound's head, ears or neck. Some trainers attempt to pull the engorged tick off the skin with tweezers, burn it with a glowing cigarette, or spray it with fly repellent. One simple way is to simply deposit a drop of cooking oil next to the base head of the tick. This will smother the tick in a few minutes and it will drop off without tearing the skin or leaving its jaws embedded in the skin.

Helpful Hint 4: Greyhounds which 'Vomit' when Travelling

It is not uncommon for a greyhound to become nauseous and vomit when travelling in the confined space of a trailer or van due to poor ventilation and 'motion sickness' – especially in greyhounds not tethered in a vehicle. To help avoid the problem, do not feed the animal within 8 hours of travelling. Either narrow the pen space in the trailer so that the greyhound cannot move around excessively, or provide a leather chain to keep it from moving and preferably face backwards when travelling. Greyhounds can move to balance themselves more quickly when travelling backwards in a trailer. Ensure adequate ventilation by way of a rotating ventilation “spinner” unit in the roof of the van or trailer. Also take the greyhound for trips inside a car for 5-6 rides so that it can become accustomed to travelling. And of course, drive carefully to avoid sudden turns or braking to allow the greyhound time to balance itself.

Do not resort to motion sickness tablets – they may be detected and can adversely affect a greyhound's performance on race day. If your greyhound vomits on the way to the race, advise the track vet as the animal may be dehydrated, depressed or have lost weight so that it is below its racing weight minimum.

Cramping – avoiding the Problem

There are a number of underlying triggers which can result in muscle cramp during a race. These include feeding high levels of starch feed, such as more than 2 slices of bread/toast per day, or more than 2 cups of a high starch low protein dry food. Greyhounds which are excitable or dehydrated also have a higher risk of cramping, as well as greyhounds racing in late night races under cold conditions without adequate warm-up. Cramping can also be a metabolic problem, due to electrolyte imbalances, lack of calcium in the diet, low potassium intake or excess kidney loss, low vitamin E and/or selenium intake and even a genetic tendency in naturally well muscled bloodlines of greyhounds.

Cramps can last a few seconds to several minutes, mainly affecting the back and long driving muscles of the front and hind limbs.

Recognising Sub-Clinical Cramping

It is not uncommon for a greyhound which is not fit for the speed or distance of a trial or a race to develop a mild muscle cramp and fail to finish strongly or sprint to the line. If a greyhound fails to run strongly towards the finish, it is important that you check the greyhound in the catching area after the race. Feel the muscles along the back line, shoulders and hind limbs for signs of 'knotting', low grade soreness or hardness. In many cases of sub-clinical cramping, simply walking the greyhound off the track and back to the kennels, "knotted" muscles will free up and the cramping may be missed as a reason for the poor performance.

Managing muscle Cramps

The management to avoid muscle cramping should be tailored to overcoming or correcting the underlying cause.

1. Improving fitness

Cramping is more likely in a greyhound which is 'underdone' or not fit enough for a race. In my experience, fit greyhounds do not cramp, although very cold night race conditions can still trigger a cramping episode. If a greyhound lacks muscle bulk and strength, it has a higher risk of cramping. Walking the animal up a hill for 1km per day, or an 5% incline on a walking machine, may help strengthen the muscles, as well as improve blood supply as the muscles exercise. The use of a 'muscle contractor' or Faradic or TENS machine daily over a 2-3 week period may also help increase muscle fitness by improving the power and strength contraction. Including short hand slips over 150-200metres, for 7-10 days on alternate days, in place of lead walking is also beneficial.

2. Supplement with Calcium and Vitamins

Providing a daily supplement of calcium, vitamin A and vitamin D3, can help to maintain optimum blood calcium levels to offset low or inadequate dietary levels. Many greyhound dry foods are fortified with calcium, but unless the full recommended amount is fed daily, a less than adequate intake of calcium to ensure optimum muscle function may result. A daily supplement containing calcium as well other nutrients, as contained in Sprinter Gold™, Results Plus™ may be helpful. A dietary evaluation to determine the risk of calcium binding foods such as spinach, is also a good idea to reduce repeated episodes of cramping.

3. Provide Muscle Antioxidants

Muscle weakness can result from a low or inadequate intake of vitamin E and/or selenium on a meat based diet. This can also cause a metabolic form of cramping due to muscle enzyme abnormalities. An antioxidant supplement containing vitamin A, vitamin E, organic selenium, magnesium and vitamin C may help maintain an optimum muscle environment to ensure strong contractions and adequate antioxidant levels in rapidly contracting muscles. A supplement, such as Sprinter Gold™ ACE™, containing a comprehensive range of antioxidant nutrients is recommended to correct low or inadequate dietary intake of these important muscle nutrients.

Many trainers find that a 20ml daily supplement of omega oils, such as Sprinter Gold ENERGY-E with added Vitamin E, also helps to correct low dietary levels of Omega 3 fats to maintain optimum muscle function in greyhounds with a history of cramping.

4. Correct Dehydration and Potassium loss

Many greyhounds suffer from chronic dehydration and potassium loss due to anxiety, excess urine buffering, excitement and inadequate fluid and potassium intake. Ensure that the greyhound's dry food meal is allowed to soak to a 'mushy' consistency by adding warm water to increase fluid intake. A supplement of 2 x 600mg slow release potassium tablets over the tongue 4 hours prior to kenneling for racing, will help maintain more even blood potassium levels and counteract excessive losses. Offering a 200-250ml (1 cupful) luke-warm drink of rehydration fluid in water after travelling (not excess so as to avoid exceeding the race weight limit) and prior to kenneling, will also help maintain optimum hydration for racing, especially under hot conditions or in a 'nervy' greyhound.

5. Warm up before a race.

It is good practise to vigorously rub the backline and hind limb driving muscles for a few seconds after taking the greyhound out of the race day cage and onto the track. It is also helpful to walk the greyhound as briskly as possible to warm it up prior to parading to the traps on a cold evening, or prior to a late night race.

It the greyhound continues to cramp, a thorough investigation of the diet, a muscle check and blood sample to determine electrolyte or other abnormalities, even anaemia, should be carried out by your veterinarian. Consult your vet for advice.