

Autoimmune Disease in Dogs: Why GME Awareness is Vital



Autoimmune disease in dogs may attack different parts of your dog's body, however, when it strikes your dog's central nervous system, this condition can be life-threatening and some symptoms of Granulomatous Meningoencephalitis (GME) often cause severe suffering like chronic migraines that require high doses of medication to help lower your dog's threshold of pain.

This article gives you a heart wrenching account of a dog named Cricket Ditty and her challenges with GME told by her pet parent and our guest blogger, Margaret Ditty. When Dog Health News read about Cricket's condition, we decided that her story needs to be heard far and wide to spread awareness about this disease.

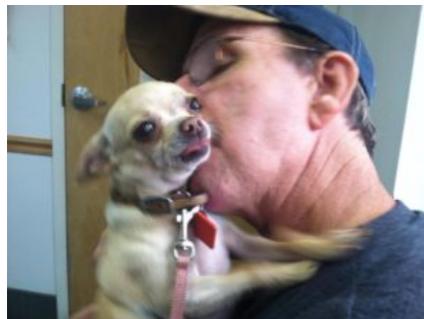
Autoimmune Disease in Dogs: Cricket Ditty – One Dog's Fight Against GME & NME

Margaret Ditty has kindly shared Cricket's story so you can understand all aspects of GME & NME.

Cricket was born in January 2009 and just turned 7 years old. She's a fawn colored, female, Applehead Toy Chihuahua with papers. One weekend I had wandered into a local pet store when I saw this precious

little furbaby in her pet store cage. She looked at me, wagged her tail and woofed at me. She had me at “woof”.

Pet store dogs aren't cheap and her going price was \$1,300.00. I asked the pet store worker if I could visit with her in their visiting area and she brought her to me. She was a mere 2-½ pounds of sheer cuteness. She was loaded with personality and spunk and not shaky like most Chihuahuas. So I called the hubby and begged him to let me purchase her. She could be every present for the entire year that he would have to purchase for me. Finally my husband caved in to my pleas, even though we already have a Miniature Pinscher with heart problems at home. I never purchased pet insurance as I always put away funds in a special pet account for my dogs figuring that my monthly contribution would be enough to cover shots and annual exams myself. Big mistake.



Cricket's first 7 years of life were wonderful. No health issues whatsoever. Then poof, in October of 2015 she started showing some unusual health symptoms that we were concerned about. She seemed to be having some vision loss and she was walking a bit differently. We took Cricket to our vet and he thought it might be a middle ear infection, prescribed ear drops and told us to use as needed. Just two weeks later she received her annual shots, but no rabies vaccination due yet. Another big mistake.

From that moment on we saw a decline in Cricket's health. Reports say that GME, an autoimmune disease in dogs, is idiopathic in nature which means no known reason it occurs, but they are finding that toy breeds are more susceptible to this disease but not sure why. In December, Cricket could still walk up and down the stairs, but by January she

refused to go up or down the stairs. She wasn't as spunky and she was bumping into things that she normally would not bump into before.

We thought Cricket might have diabetes as she wasn't seeing very well. This time I took her to the Animal Hospital that ran a CBC blood panel and specifically checked for diabetes. They noted that Cricket could not walk very well, definitely could not see very well, and said she was almost blind. After the blood work came back they found that Cricket had a severe bladder infection and put her on antibiotics and an anti-inflammatory medication. She seemed to be getting better as apparently the anti-inflammatory medication was helping with the inflammation in her brain from the undiagnosed GME, an autoimmune disease in dogs. Then a week later, after she had finished this medication, Cricket started getting worse.

We took Cricket back to our local Animal Hospital who determined she indeed was having neurological problems and referred us to a canine neurologist located in Richmond, Virginia, the only one in our entire state. We made the 2-½ hour trip one way as soon as they could fit us in.

Cricket was in bad shape by the time we visited the neurologist at as she had been fighting this disease since October of 2015, unbeknownst to us and our educated vets! Dr. Michael Higginbotham DVM DACVIM, with Bush Veterinary Neurology Service in Richmond, Virginia, examined her and determined she needed an MRI and possibly a spinal tap which cost us \$3,200.00 . After he completed the MRI he determined, due to the Chiari-like malformation in the back of her brain, she could not undergo a spinal tap as it would kill her.



The MRI showed that Cricket had massive necrosis in the brain and Dr. Higginbotham determined she not only had GME but NME, which was due to her delayed diagnosis and treatment of this autoimmune disease in dogs. Necrosis is when the white cells eat up parts of the brain, leave lesions and empty cavities in the brain that then are filled up with fluids, which in turn cause even more inflammation in the brain. To save her life he had to hospitalize her overnight with Chemo Treatments via IV. So that's exactly what we did. We hospitalized her to get her better and took her home the next day.

Cricket looked extremely weak and tired, not because of the Chemo as dogs react differently than humans when receiving this treatment, but due to the debilitating migraines which can be the most painful effects of this disease in the brain.

We came home and gave Cricket the high dose of prednisone they told us to give her every 12 hours. Although this drug helps bring down the inflammation in your dog's brain, it has many side effects including weight gain, excessive thirst and a pot belly. Then about a week later she was reduced to 2.5 mg twice a day and put on Cyclosporine, which is a drug used for humans to keep them from rejecting transplanted organs. Cyclosporine helps reduce your dog's white blood cells from attacking your dog's brain any further. This med costs \$156.00 per month!



A month later, Cricket did not seem to be getting any better so we had to drive up to Richmond for yet another \$175.00 visit. Dr. Higginbotham wanted to hospitalize Cricket for 4 days that would have run another \$2,200.00 which we did not have. After I broke down and cried in front of the neurologist, he cut us a break. For an additional \$156.00, he sent her home with a two day supply of Chemo that my local vet would have to give to Cricket.

I just cried all the way home holding that Chemo in my hand like it was gold since it was apparently life saving for my precious Cricket. My local vet administered the Chemo and Cricket seemed to start getting better. In about 10 days, we had to bring her back for another CBC to check her white cells.

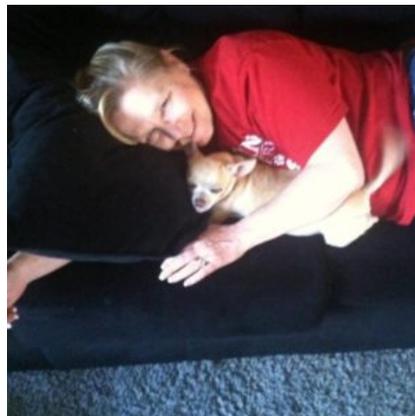
Since Cricket was not stable on any type of wood or tile flooring throughout my home; we put down all kinds of throw rugs in the family room and put up gates to the entrance and exits. My husband also made Cricket a doggy walker out of PVC pipe and I sewed the body support to her walker so she could walk on the kitchen tile floors without falling. This worked and it gave her greater mobility and security on the floors.

To help Cricket regain some strength, I bought a doggy life jacket and proceeded to do water therapy in our bathtub which seems to help control her weight gain from the prednisone and gives her more muscle strength. Our vet thought it was an excellent idea, so I continue doing this to help rehabilitate her with hope that Cricket's brain can re-channel

the neurological damage she's suffered from this autoimmune disease in dogs and learn to walk on floors without slipping.

Unfortunately, Cricket didn't seem like she was getting any better, meaning her old self, and we had to take her back to the neurologist. Dr. Higginbotham gave her 10 mg of Lomustine, a very strong Chemo Therapy in pill form. This treatment was \$456.00. Needless to say we are hemorrhaging vet bills to save her precious little life! This does not include the checkups with our local vet and all the additional blood work to check her white blood cell counts and to check for liver problems from the prednisone! She seems to be doing better since this last treatment, however she still slips on floors and has good and bad days due to the neurological damage to her brain from the delayed diagnosis and treatment of this autoimmune disease in dogs.

During this whole journey I joined a support group on Facebook to learn more about GME, and then I created my own group. I personally created a GME Awareness Pamphlet that I am passing out to every person I meet at drive-thru windows, inside local pet stores and veterinarian practices, at stores or to dog owners out walking their dog. Members of my site are passing my GME Awareness Pamphlets out as well, and some members live outside of the US! I also created a GME & NME Awareness Video that features many dogs on these sites that are going through this horrible disease, and the pet parents who are shelling out thousands and thousands of dollars to help treat and save their pets lives. We are sharing this video with every doggy website on Facebook.



It's been an amazing but heart breaking journey. I've learned a lot about autoimmune disease in dogs and made many precious friends on these sites who are going through the same health crisis with their beloved furbabys! They're amazing to know and truly an inspiration of commitment and courage towards the love of their precious furbabys.

I want to spread awareness about GME and NME to other pet parents to help save them the pain that they and their dogs could go through if not treated early. Some dogs can die within 24 to 48 hours of diagnosis because many vets are unfamiliar with this disease to the central nervous system. Your dog may have some or all of these symptoms.



Symptoms of GME

- Head Pressing: Dog will press their head against things
- Weakness in legs
- Behavior changes
- Circling
- Seizures
- Blindness
- Drowsiness
- Head tilting
- Unsteady walk or gait

I want to bring awareness about GME and NME to pet parents of toy breeds because your dogs are at greater risk of this autoimmune disease. Annual vaccine shots given to toy breeds at the same dose for a 125 pound dog cause your toy breed's autoimmune system to "melt down". This high vaccine dose is like throwing fuel on embers of an already slow burning fire existing in toy breeds! After your initial puppy shots in the first year of your dog's life, I recommend you have your local vet administer a titer test prior to any additional annual shots! A titer test will determine if your dog has sufficient antibodies against current dog diseases and if they do, you **DO NOT** have to perform an annual shot with the exception of Rabies, which is required every three years per state law. If you currently have a GME or NME dog, remember that your dog must be healthy enough to receive further vaccinations, which they usually are not and are EXEMPT from further annual shots to include rabies. Ask your vet to use a big red marker on your pets file that says "NO FURTHER SHOTS REQUIRED." A re-vaccination of a GME & NME dog would mean certain death!

My biggest advice to any pet parent today is, "If you own a pet, be sure to sign up for pet insurance immediately!" You cannot possibly imagine how much you will pay when trying to help your dog with a life threatening autoimmune disease in dogs like GME or NME. It's horrific, and you feel like you are at your VET's mercy because the other option of putting down your beloved furbaby is not an option if they are a member of your family. Pets, to some people, are just as much a part of your family as your own biological children. Some of us commit to them for life as they mean that much to us as they truly are man's best friend, full of love and devotion for you. Do they deserve any less than the best medical care that anybody else in your family would deserve? I say "No they don't" and for loves sake I will fight the fight and bring awareness with every ounce of my being and with all my heart! Thank you for allowing me to share Cricket's story and bring awareness!



Warmest Regards,

Margaret Ditty

Pet Parent to Cricket Ditty

Remember to always, “Educate, Encourage and Share”

You can find Margaret Ditty on Facebook at **Pet Parents Fighting NME & GME “Educate, Encourage, Share”** and join her group to stay up to date with Cricket’s condition and learn more from other members of her group. All photos in this article are of Cricket Ditty and were provided by Margaret Ditty.

This article gives you a full disclosure about Cricket Ditty’s fight against GME and NME, an **autoimmune disease in dogs**, so you can take better care of your dog. Dog Health News is honored to have Margaret Ditty’s trust to share Cricket’s story and acknowledges the incredible strength Cricket has while she deals with the effects of this disease. Margaret Ditty’s passion to spread awareness about GME and NME is unstoppable.

Share Cricket Ditty’s story with your friends and family so they understand the symptoms and challenges of this potentially deadly disease with no known cause. You can always depend on the best dog health strategies from Dog Health News.

To view Cricket's Story on Dog Health News copy and paste this link into your browser today!: You will also see many other fur baby's stories in the comment section below this article who are fighting for their lives!

<http://doghealthnews.com/autoimmune-disease-dogs-gme-awareness-vital/>

And please don't forget to share it with every dog owner you know today! It could save a doggy life!