

PROGRESSIVE RETINAL ATROPHY

What is Progressive Retinal Atrophy? Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) is an inherited disease of the retina. The retina is the tissue in the back of the eye that senses light, similar to the film in a camera. This disorder initially causes night blindness that eventually progresses to total blindness.

What causes Progressive Retinal Atrophy? PRA is an inherited disease that is passed on from parents to offspring. PRA is not caused by diet, infection, or other environmental causes. PRA is similar to the inherited disease Retinitis Pigmentosa in human beings. The underlying biochemical defect has been determined for several dog breeds.

Are certain breeds of dogs prone to Progressive Retinal Atrophy? Yes. The American and English Cocker Spaniel, Labrador Retriever, Miniature Schnauzer, Miniature Poodle, and Portuguese Water Dog are prone to PRA, although any breed may be affected.

How do I recognize that my dog has Progressive Retinal Atrophy? Most dogs with PRA initially have poor night vision. This decrease in night vision may be manifested as an aversion to go outdoors at night, reluctance to jump up and down from furniture in the evening, or a disinclination to go down an unlit hallway. Poor night vision eventually progresses to complete blindness.

How is Progressive Retinal Atrophy diagnosed? If PRA is advanced, a veterinary ophthalmologist is able to diagnose the disorder by examining the retina with an ophthalmoscope. If PRA is not advanced, an electroretinogram (ERG) is required for diagnosis. An ERG is an electronic test of the retina similar to an electrocardiogram of the heart. A special contact lens electrode is placed on the topically anesthetized eye. A computer program measures the electrical signal produced by the retina after a light is flashed into the eye.

Is there a treatment for Progressive Retinal Atrophy? Unfortunately no. Progressive Retinal Atrophy eventually leads to blindness in all cases. The time it will take before blindness is complete varies from dog to dog. Thankfully, PRA is not a painful condition. Animals with PRA may develop cataracts that make the pupils turn white. Cataract surgery is not recommended, since this will not improve vision.

Should I breed my dog if it has had Progressive Retinal Atrophy? No. This is a genetic disease and may be passed on to offspring.

Dogs with PRA adapt well to vision loss. They are able to memorize their surroundings, recognize their families, and live happy lives.