

ACTH Stimulation Test: Understanding Your Pet's Hormonal Health

At Franktown Animal Clinic, we know your pet is more than just an animal—they're family. When your dog isn't feeling their best or something in their lab work looks off, it's our job to dig deeper and find answers. One of the key tools we use to get a clearer picture of your pet's internal health is the **ACTH stimulation test**.

This test helps us diagnose serious but manageable endocrine conditions like **Cushing's Disease** and **Addison's Disease**. Early diagnosis and proactive treatment can make all the difference in your dog's quality of life—and we're here to guide you every step of the way.

What is ACTH?

ACTH stands for **Adrenocorticotropic Hormone**, a hormone released by the pituitary gland that stimulates your dog's adrenal glands to produce **cortisol**—a critical hormone that regulates stress response, metabolism, blood pressure, and immune function.

What is the ACTH Stimulation Test?

The **ACTH Stimulation Test** checks how well your dog's adrenal glands respond to ACTH. It's the gold-standard test used to detect:

- **Cushing's Disease (hyperadrenocorticism)** – too much cortisol
- **Addison's Disease (hypoadrenocorticism)** – too little cortisol
- **Adrenal suppression** caused by prolonged steroid use

When Do We Recommend This Test?

We may recommend ACTH testing if your pet is:

- Showing symptoms of adrenal disease
- Having abnormal blood work (like high liver enzymes or electrolyte imbalances)
- Taking long-term steroid medications
- Showing general signs of illness with no obvious cause

What Does the Test Involve?

This is a **quick, in-clinic procedure** that takes a few hours:

1. A **baseline blood sample** is collected.
2. Your dog receives an injection of **synthetic ACTH**.
3. After one hour, a **second blood sample** is collected.
4. We compare the two samples to see how your dog's adrenal glands respond.

Symptoms to Watch For

Signs of Cushing's Disease (Too Much Cortisol):

- Increased thirst and urination

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- Increased appetite
- Pot-bellied appearance
- Thinning hair or hair loss
- Recurring skin infections
- Muscle weakness or lethargy

Signs of Addison's Disease (Too Little Cortisol):

- Vomiting, diarrhea
- Lethargy or collapsing episodes
- Shaking or muscle tremors
- Poor appetite and weight loss
- Slow heart rate
- Electrolyte imbalances

If Your Dog is Diagnosed... What's Next?

Cushing's Disease

- Daily oral medication (e.g., trilostane) to manage cortisol production
- Routine ACTH monitoring tests every 3–6 months
- With proper treatment, most dogs maintain a great quality of life

Addison's Disease

- Hormone replacement with monthly injections and/or daily oral meds
- Lifelong management with periodic blood tests
- Dogs with Addison's can thrive with consistent care and monitoring

Ongoing Support & Monitoring

- Regular bloodwork is key to keeping your dog stable
- We'll work with you to fine-tune medications and monitor progress
- Our team is always here for support, questions, and next steps

Franktown Animal Clinic – We're Here to Help

Franktown Animal Clinic

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