

Stitch is a 4 year old, male, blue merle, Border Collie. At approximately 18 months old Stitch started to show signs of, what was initially thought to be, hip dysplasia; although this was surprising given that both his parents had been given excellent hip scores and he had not been excessively exercised as a puppy.

After short exercise, Stitch had started displaying a wobbly gait and had been staggering and falling to the side and scuffing his rear legs when walking. This was particularly most noticeable during warmer weather.

At around about the time Stitch first started displaying these physical symptoms, he had additionally started to present with signs of reactivity. As it is always recommended when a dog first becomes reactive, (which was out-of-character for him), the first point of call should always be a Veterinary check so off to the Vet we went.

After consultation with our Veterinarian; examination, extension and flexion of his rear legs, we decided to opt for X-Rays. The results of the X-Rays confirmed that Stitch had a perfect set of hips and had absolutely no sign of hip dysplasia whatsoever!

Our Veterinarian then decided we needed to try to eliminate some other causes for his symptoms. It was suggested that following a recurrence of his symptoms we should undertake a Glucose test and also look at eliminating the possibility of Myasthenia Gravis, (MG).

At this point, after undertaking my own research into Myasthenia Gravis, I personally didn't believe that the symptoms of MG matched the symptoms Stitch was displaying and it was during this time that I was shown footage of a dog displaying, what is believed to be, Border Collie Collapse, (BCC).

As a result of his symptoms and his reactivity, I began to search for a form of exercise that would help with his general fitness and keep his heart healthy but I needed to find an activity that wouldn't put pressure on him physically to the point where he displayed symptoms again. In addition, I also wanted to find something that would allow him to have fun without the stress of having to either meet other dogs or be placed into stressful situations, whilst I looked at formulating a plan to help with his reactivity.

Hydrotherapy helped with both his exercise and reactivity. Being able to exercise him without his showing any BCC symptoms helped maintain his fitness and a better state of mind. A reduction in his stress levels assisted with our behaviour modification training, which consisted of a relaxation protocol combined with Grisha Stewart's Behavioural Adjustment Training, (BAT).

Stitch loves everyone at Bluewaters Hydrotherapy Centre and they've all helped to make him feel at ease whilst there. Whilst he's been swimming, the Staff and Owners at the Centre have been able to interact with Stitch on his terms whilst he's in the water and he's quite happily been able to bring his toy over to them inviting them to interact with him during his sessions; which is an amazing step forward! As an added benefit, it really has helped to know that the Staff and Owners have real understanding of his issues both from a medical and behavioural point-of-view; having both the training and the experience. At no point was he EVER forced to participate in the pool activities, which has been key for his 'rehabilitation'. At all times, Stitch was given the choice to participate and this was absolutely key.

It is a slow process and sometimes we take one step forward and then two steps back but without a shadow of a doubt, hydrotherapy has been one of the best activities we have participated in that has assisted my dog.

As an added benefit, Stitch has always been a 'water baby' and one of the overwhelming benefits of hydrotherapy has been that Stitch has found something that he LOVES to do and it's been an activity both he & I have thoroughly enjoyed together.

Note: Unlike Exercised Induced Collapse, (EIC) in Labradors, there is currently no test for BCC in Collies. In Labradors they have found a mutation in the DMN1 gene, which they can test for but which is not presented in the Border Collie. The College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Minnesota are currently undertaking a study into BCC to establish the cause and develop a diagnostic test. We are looking into participating in this research by sending bloodwork over to the US and hopefully, if their study does find a mutation, we can get a definitive diagnosis and can incorporate a treatment plan.

For anyone interested in following the progress of, or taking part in, the College of Veterinary Medicine's BCC study at the University of Minnesota then further details can be found at the following link:-

<http://www.vetmed.umn.edu/departments/veterinary-and-biomedical-sciences/research/canine-genetics-lab/genetic-research/border-collie-collapse>